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September/October 2003
Issue 22

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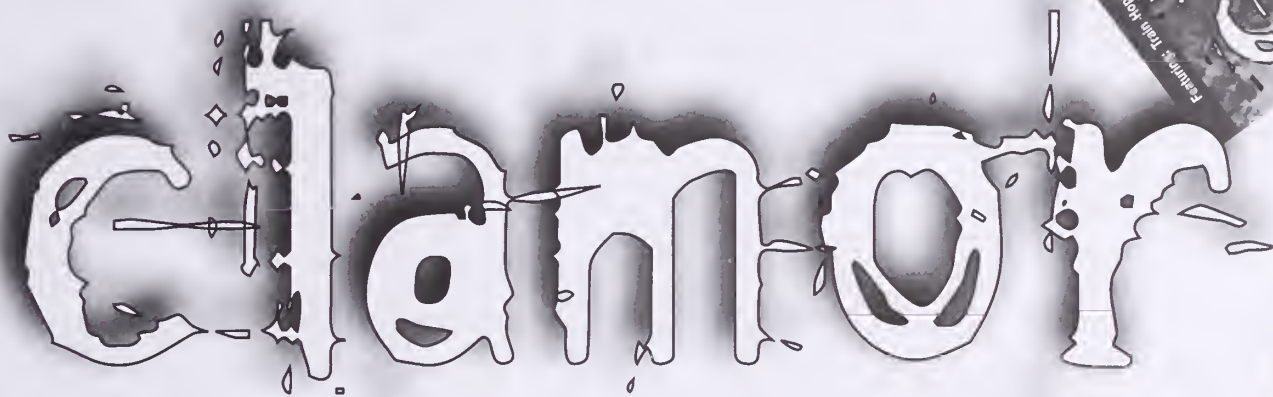
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A young girl in the Xin Jiang Province. Photo by Joyce Orbell. Story on p. 27

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from your editors

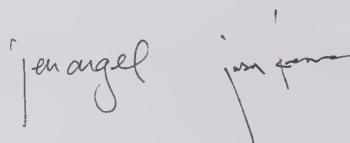
As a group of people who love to travel, we knew this issue was coming. Judging by the record number of submissions we received from you all, you're globetrotters as well. We were inundated with stories of Americans abroad — Japan, Malaysia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, the Philippines — you name it.

We weren't really going for the guidebook-style narrative: where to stay, what to eat, etc. What we have brought you here is more about how people think and deal with travel. How it changes your worldview and makes you understand yourself and the world around you. Similarly, no discussion of international travel would be complete without looking at how travelers affect the communities they visit.

Throughout many of these Americans-as-would-be-tourist stories, some of them occurring in and around the time that America began its official war with Iraq, there is one underlying current. Americans are not popular. From Danee Voorhees's temptation to masquerade as a Canadian throughout Malaysia (p. 60) and her insightful comments on race in the Philippines (p. 29) to a few Austrians' perspectives overheard by Joel Hanson (p. 66), Americans abroad are faced with a reality that doesn't exactly resemble the world that's pumped into our living rooms on the television. Everyone wants to be like Americans, right? Tell that to Casey Boland. He and his friends visited Hiroshima (p. 22) — we dropped "the bomb" there, remember?

Ultimately, though, travel is as much about where you're at mentally as well as geographically. If we gleaned nothing else from the contributions in this issue, we've learned that travel, like our everyday interactions, requires a skillful negotiation of differences between people if it's going to be a rewarding experience for everyone. Mutual respect, deference, humility, awareness, and an open mind are just as crucial to us in our work-a-day world as they are when we're traveling the globe.

Thanks for reading.



PS: Please note that Clamor has moved its headquarters to Toledo, Ohio's Old West End. Only 20 miles but worlds away from Bowling Green. Please reach us at: Clamor :: PO Box 20128 :: Toledo, OH 43610

CLAMOR's mission is to provide a media outlet that reflects the reality of alternative politics and culture in a format that is accessible to people from a variety of backgrounds. CLAMOR exists to fill the voids left by mainstream media. We recognize and celebrate the fact that each of us can and should participate in media, politics, and culture. We publish writing and art that exemplify the value we place on autonomy, creativity, exploration, and cooperation. CLAMOR is an advocate of progressive social change through active creation of political and cultural alternatives.



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letters

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or write us at PO Box 20128 Toledo, OH 43610
Letters may be edited for length.
Not all letters received will be printed.

Funny guy hits the toilet, but misses the point.

Philip E. Lefebvre's "A Month Sitting" (July/August 2003) was thought provoking and funny, but I think he ought to give us ladies a little more credit. Nobody can force us to mutilate ourselves for "beauty," no matter how strong the media messages are! Being a girl, for me, is more about being super smart, seeing through the bullshit, being tough and courageous enough to stand up for yourself when necessary (often as it may be), than sitting down to pee. In fact, the sitting down to pee part is fucking irrelevant! Many women choose to shave and wear pantyhose, but in no way does that make them victims of the patriarchy, and I applaud those choices if that's what they want to do. Maybe Philip would have better luck understanding women, or even simply not being a "sexist pig," by being present with them and asking about their experiences. A real live woman is much more interesting than any book on feminism.

Josie Ives
Seattle, WA

Vegans pissed by speciesism.

I read with frustration and disappointment Joe Diffie's piece, "Oppressive Vegans are Killing the Movement" (May/June 2003).

I, like many others who read *Clamor*, would consider myself an activist. I believe that all forms of exploitation, oppression, and violence share the same base and are tightly entangled. I believe it is impossible to critique and act against one form of oppression without recognizing its attachment to other, perhaps less obvious, forms. We should reject the notion that human problems must be dealt with before we begin to tackle the oppression of animals, as well as the anthropocentric ideal that some things value is determined by its usefulness to humans (especially rich, white, straight, male ones). We must stop promoting some forms of oppression by participating in them, ignoring them, or dismissing them while we focus (as activists) on other social issues that are of equal (and not more) importance.

I agree with Mr. Diffie that self-righteousness can be extremely counterproductive in pushing social change forward, and we need to be patient and understanding in our pursuit for true and total liberation for all. Furthermore, I agree we need a variety of tactics and strategies to create the type of world compassion and justice demands. For those of us who see chickens, dolphins, chimpanzees, trout, parrots, pigs, elephants and the many other sentient animals as our brothers and sisters in this world — we want to see solidarity with other species and the natural world, and not just with other human beings. This is a fundamental and wholly important issue that should not be ignored

or trivialized. A broader vision of family and a wider concern for others is possible if we can begin to think outside the box labeled "speciesism." For the foxes in leghold traps, the lobsters about to be thrown into boiling pots, elephants serving life in chains in circuses, and the chickens being trucked to slaughter, I hope we come to this conclusion sooner rather than later.

P.J. McKosky
College Park, MD

Smokin' Joe should have his activist card pulled.

I did not particularly care for the recent article "Oppressive Vegans," by Joe Diffie (May/June 2003). I belong to a small but strong animal rights group in the Chicago area. We are all strict vegans. We are also anti-war, sexism, racism, homophobia, and anti-death penalty. For Joe to call himself an "activist" and eat meat is hypocritical, in my opinion. In our group, if someone does not adhere to our common ideologies they are asked to leave and/or are kicked out of the group. We look down on this. Activists must share the same visions to be effective in change. I do not know of any non-vegan/vegetarian activists in our community. Also, most, if not all of us are straight-edge. We do not even take over-the-counter drugs, or consume refined sugar & caffeine. I found the article to be discouraging and unreflecting of most activist communities. I hope that Joe sees the "light", and changes his diet, and stops drinking and smoking.

Bunny
Chicago, IL

There's a reason why it's called "a movement."

Just bought your magazine for the 1st time at a bookstore in Alabama — the "why you'd be a fool (and not very enlightened) to write off the [sports aspect] of American culture"... issue (March/April 2003). Most of us who loved sports before we became progressive activists have had to wrestle with how to justify our time-consuming devotion to such pursuits, and it's my observation that we deteriorate to a point where we are forced to get physical. Those of us who have aged can only counsel the youth that it is even ok to regularly distract oneself just for the fun of it, that it's worth the risk of engaging in some sport if possible, while working to not let it become our principal identity. The martial arts activity Daniel Burton Rose is involved in, as well as his teacher, is of a more serious nature ("Reinventing Tradition," March/April 2003). But I would argue that we also need to — and should not apologize for — doing things that would otherwise be looked at,

superficially, as "a waste of time." That everything we do does not have to be justified as compatible with our ideological proclivities, per se. And still be looked at by others, and ourselves, as serious self-sacrificing activists — something undoubtedly required of us.

Brad Wendel
Mobile, AL

Your magazine sucks. STOP. No time for complete sentences. STOP. Or subject-verb agreement. STOP.

Can't renew magazine. Physically stinks. Too much (paper and ink) and the graphics are bad. Small print and printing over pictures makes stuff unreadable. *Atlantic Monthly*, *Harpers*, *New Yorker* is (sic) good graphics -- readability over appearance.

P. Erkel
Montreal, Quebec

Give Coke a chance.

I mostly enjoyed your last issue. Bravo on some good think-pieces on the issue of food; it's important to pay attention to what keeps us going and the politics of it all. Unfortunately, I frowned twice at the knee-jerk reactionary attitude toward corporations given by high-browed organic foods consumer, author of the open source foods article, Eliah Chapman ("Open Source Foods," May/June 2003).

To underscore agribusiness corporate greed, Mr./s/rs./? Chapman introduces several prominent corporate acquisition transactions of the last few years facing the fledgling organic food market. Unlike what s/he would like us to believe, it is not deleterious that Odwalla and Fresh Samantha, for example, are owned by Minute-Maid, owned by Coca-Cola. The offering of organic products by the giants could give the likes of Fresh Samantha and Odwalla a chance to grow. With the infusion of new capital by larger firms, organic products will have a supply of capital that can usher in the possibility of larger-scale distribution. As long as there is a solid demand and fair profits to be earned in organic products, we should perpetuate their existence, and not annihilate our source of potentially healthier food because we despise big corporations, as Eliah suggests s/he is about to do in favor of placing the votes of his organic dollars at the local farmers' market. Our local farmers, as good as it feels to directly support them, are not the only source of organic products and their distribution network is unfortunately limited. Hopefully, as more of us feel more okay with consuming from big corporations, our dollars can also vote in terms of profit margins. In the end, a large organic foods market will bring down prices significantly as more

entrants in the market crowd out the possibility to exploit extreme profits. If anything, what we have to fear is that agribusiness will suppress the innovation and competition that seem so alive in the organics industry by locking out other entrants from the distribution networks and through their pricing prowess.

Of course, there are also major benefits that accrue to larger corporations from their actions to offer organic products. Although those of us on the left are quick to conclude it's the evil, greed-based profit motive that has made agribusiness a johnny-come-lately in the organics market, I think there are other factors at play. Regarding Fresh Samantha and Odwalla, it is in the interest of Coke's portfolio of saleable goods to be well diversified. If their soft-drink division stagnates, they may recoup their losses from exploding sales of Fresh Samantha. Of course, all of this depends on how well Coca-Cola, through its subsidiary Minute-Maid, handles operations of the high-end juices. Additionally, Minute Maid's investments, its purchase of Fresh Samantha and Odwalla, gives it the option of selling these assets (Fresh Samantha and Odwalla brands) to another firm, spinning them off as their own corporate entities, or keeping operations in-house indefinitely. Of course, all of this depends on how well these drinks do over time. It will be an interesting development to watch over the years. Unfortunately, I doubt there will be mass autonomous movements to produce *just foods* in a system free from domination, something resembling an anarcho-socialist bio-regional utopia of sorts. In the meantime, I will on occasion indulge in the moment's selection of a Fresh Samantha when I have the dollars to spend and the

utility to enjoy the offering.

I have tried to elucidate the market side of the argument so absent in Mr/s/rs Chapman's short article. Next time, I feel Eliah should have the double compunction to rethink the dialectic of markets and morals, without resorting to the moral high ground not anchored in the material aspect of daily living.

Yonathan
New York, NY

ed.note: Unless Coke is planning on replacing all the soda machines in public schools with Fresh Samantha or Odwalla machines, We're going to have to side with E. Chapman. Coke hasn't exactly done much to earn the benefit of doubt here.

CORRECTIONS

On the last page of the July/August 2003 issue, the Art Activism piece incorrectly listed the UPSO website. It should have read www.upso.org

The photos of Jem Cohen ("Embracing the Digital Divide," July/August 2003) were mistakenly attributed to the author Charles Sweitzer, who has very little knowledge of how to use a camera. The shots were actually skillfully taken by Kim McCoy.

A sidebar on the Global Aids Fund ("Global Aids Fund. If Not Now, When?" July/August 2003) was left unattributed, but it was actually written by Katie Krauss.

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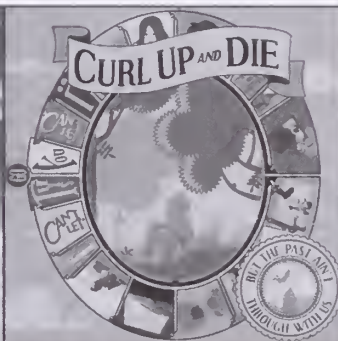
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Jimmy Bryant (p. 12) is an illustrator. He believes that art is essential in today's slick computer age, which is why he enjoys making art that is made by hand. His address is 5581 E. Jewell Ave., Denver, CO 80222.

Gabriel Constans's (p. 58) eclectic assortment of profound and profane prose has appeared in numerous magazines, journals, newspapers, and books in North America, Europe, and Asia. His up and coming collection of stories is *The Penis Dialogues: Handle With Care*, which is scheduled for release in November 2003 by Aslan Publishing. He can be contacted at constans@gogabriel.com.

Melita Ann Curphy (p. 58) spends most of her time drawing fart comics or cat people, sculpting monsters, driving poorly and watching judge shows. Hailing from Texas, she drives a huge cadillac with longhorns bolted on the grill just like her dad, Boss Hog. She plans to open a store that sells nothing but pewter wizard figurines and kitten calendars. See her art at missmonster.com or email her at missmonster@bigplanet.com

Matthew A. Donahue (p. 13) is a multidimensional artist working within a variety of creative forms: music producer DJ/MC/vocalist, visual artist, writer, documentary film maker, instructor at BGSU's Dept. of Popular Culture, and Music Librarian/Archivist. His web site is www.md1210.com.

Gavin J. Grant (p. 17) freelances — and sometimes travels — from Northampton, MA. His zine, *Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet*, travels much further than he does.

David Greedy (pp. 44) is a photographer and traveler. You can reach him care of *Clamor*.

Ayun Halliday (p. 25) is the sole staff member of the zine *The East Village Inky* and author of *The Big Rumpus: A Mother's Tale from the Trenches* and the upcoming *No Touch Monkey! And Other Travel Lessons Learned Too Late*. She lives in Brooklyn with Greg Kotis and their kids, Inky and Milo. Visit her site at www.ayunhalliday.com.

A Minnesotan by chance, a Seattleite by choice, **Joel Hanson** (p. 66) is a writer, musician, traveler, and long-distance runner. He writes essays for *The Washington Free Press* and music reviews for *Resonance* magazine in Seattle. He is currently teaching English in Casablanca, Morocco while attempting to realize a few creative projects of his own making. He can be reached at: petitfrere30@hotmail.com.

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Gregory Keller (p. 36) lives in Brooklyn. He was born and raised in Manhattan.

Joshua Krause (p. 57) is a San Diego artist whose illustrations are serving editorial clients in magazines, newspapers, and book publishing, as well as gracing galleries, CD covers, clothing, and skateboards. See more of his work at www.krauseart.com.

Nicolas Lampert (p. 41) Nicolas Lampert resides in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He is co-founder of Drawing Resistance: A Traveling Political Art Show (www.drawingresistance.org) and a adjunct professor at the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design. He can be reached at: animaltrap@yahoo.com

Courtney E. Martin (p. 18) is a writer, social activist, and educator living in Brooklyn, New York with her brother, poet and editor of *Puppyflowers.com*. When she is not road tripping across the country, she can be found working with immigrant teenagers, writing and producing plays with production company 12 Fiery Women, completing her Master's Degree in writing and social change at NYU's Gallatin School of Individualized Study, or dancing her ass off in some a random bar. She welcomes your feedback at cem1231@hotmail.com.

Joyce Orobello (p. 27) an English teacher travel junky. However, right now she's somewhat bound to academia as well as her home state of New York while pursuing a Master's Degree at Columbia University Teachers College. Contact her at jmorobello@hotmail.com.

Ricky Powell (p. 51) is currently active in vegan outreach efforts to expose the horrors of factory farming. He lives below an elevator shaft in Laguna Beach, Calif. He can be contacted at: ecoxvegan@hotmail.com.

Jason Powers (p. 31) is a human. He resides in Portland, OR where he rides his bike, gardens, records music, works at homeless youth shelters, and contemplates the absurdity that we call civilization. Declarations of adoration and/or with loathing should be sent to the_masses@yahoo.com.

Erik Rose (p. 17) is a graduate of The Columbus College of Art and Design. He is an editor/writer/illustrator for the comedy/arts paper *Tastes Like Chicken* (www.tlchicken.com). You may view more of his artwork and buy prints at www.erikrose.com

Melanie Rubenstein (p. 44) is between travels and eagerly awaits her next move. She loves reality television especially "The Amazing Race." She would love to visit the country of Bhutan one day. She can be reached via e-mail at melanierubenstein@yahoo.com

Jeff Shantz (p. 49) is a member of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty and co-host of the Anti-Poverty Report on community radio station CHRY 105.5 FM in Toronto.

Matthew Turissini (p. 9) helped found and works with Boxcar Books in Bloomington, Ind. He usually also has his hands dirty with bicycles, gardens, metal work, organizing, buckwheat, or a number of other activities. He likes people, and you can contact him at matthew@boxcarbooks.org.

Win Vitkowsky (p. 64) is the editor of the Connecticut based literary zine *Common Sense*, a mixed media artist, and an anti-war organizer for the SCSU Anti-war coalition.

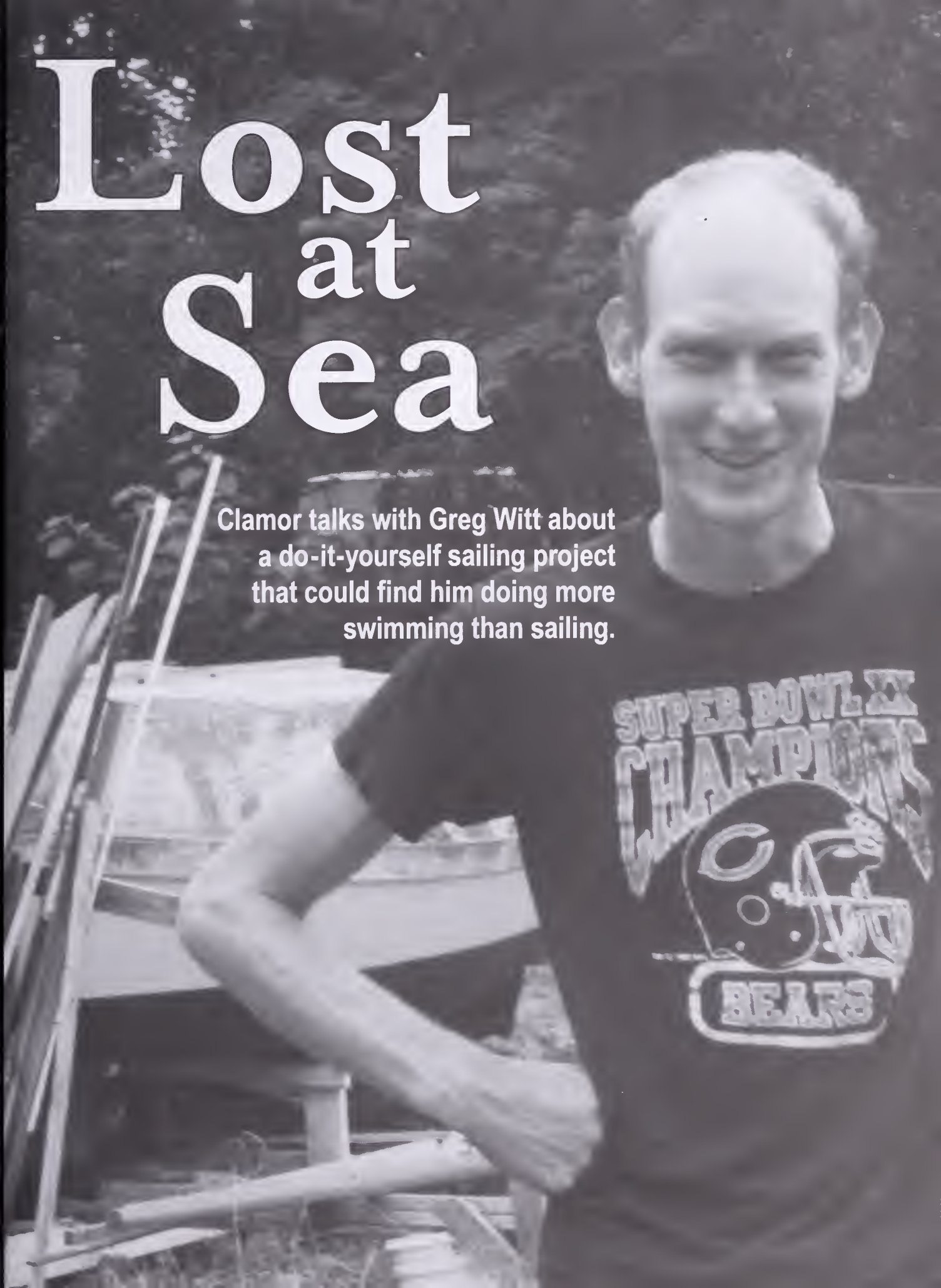
Danee Voorhees (pp. 29 & 60) believes that the repercussions of colonialism are highly underrated and ignored. She also thinks you should study the history and cultural practices of a place before travelling there. She may be contacted at daneev@graffiti.net.

Steve Wilson (p. 47) is the editor of *Motionsickness: The Other Side of Travel*. Visit www.motionsickmag.com.

Yeo is a multidimedia artist/designer/educator from Singapore, and has been working in the arts for over ten years in a variety of countries.

Lost at Sea

Clamor talks with Greg Witt about
a do-it-yourself sailing project
that could find him doing more
swimming than sailing.



I met Greg Witt about the time he had the idea to build the 25-foot sailboat that is now nearing completion. By the time this issue is published, Greg will probably be traveling and living on the boat. The project has always struck me as a rare instance of combining two different approaches to traveling. Greg has spent over two years getting ready to travel. Yet, when he leaves, he will leave without knowing how to sail or what weather patterns are like for where he is going. It's an odd mix of planning, preparation, controlled traveling, and carefree drifting.



interview
and photos
Matthew Turissini

Clamor: When did you decide to build the boat?

Greg: It was a few years ago. I had decided that school was really dumb. I didn't really care about the stuff I was supposed to be learning and there wasn't any point to it, and I just want to build a boat. I decided I may as well finish school though. So, a year later during the summer, I started working on the boat. I was going to go to school, but I may as well work on the boat too.

Why did you want to build a boat specifically, instead of something else?

Well, it was all because of what I wanted to do. I didn't want to pay rent because it was too expensive. It just seemed to make more sense, living on a boat than living in a house. That way I could travel and be at home. It just seemed like an ideal living situation.

Has the reason you've been building the boat stayed the same over time?

No, it's changed from that to I've got this project that I started and it's too big of a project not to finish. It's become what I do, you know? It's turned into how I think about myself. It's pretty much my job. What else am I doing? I told my landlord I may not be able to pay rent because I'm working. I'm working as hard as I can and I'm not getting paid for it. It's my job.

What's the design of the boat based on?

I really wish I would have just designed the boat myself, but I didn't know anything about boat building or anything about boats. I could have figured it out, but I just went to the library and got a book that had dimensions in the back. Just started building one of those. I'd never been on a big sailboat, so I didn't know anything about it. I'm kind of risking my life with the thing too, so I should make sure it's good.

What book did you read?

I read a couple of books. There's one amazing book by George Bueller called Bueller's Backyard Boat Building. It's based on really good philosophy. It's all about using materials that are available, in the spirit of traditional boat building like using what you have and being practical about it. Making stuff that makes sense, is cheap, and works well. The only problem with it is that that's all about building big ocean-going boats with weighted keels. The design

I'm using is from a nineteenth-century East Coast work boat. It was designed for oystering.

Is there any electricity on the boat?

I need to have something just for navigation lights just to be legal and not get killed. I'm probably going to have a solar panel and charge a battery, but I haven't even looked into it yet. Or I may fix up an old outboard and rig up a car alternator to it.

How much of the material was salvaged and how much was new?

That's the problem. The whole time I've been building the boat, I've also been going to school and/or working a whole lot. I didn't have enough time to both salvage material and work on the boat. Even working with new materials, it's taken a ridiculous amount of time without having to pull nails and joining two short boards together. Half the wood in the boat is plywood. You can't salvage many sizeable pieces of plywood that are in good enough condition to warrant putting time into. I bought the cheapest material possible which has been kind of silly — CVX plywood for the hull which is just a bad idea, and dry wall screws in some places. I don't know what the hell I was thinking. For another dollar a pound, I could have used galvanized steel. I ended up going back with galvanized steel anyway.

I've got a problem where I don't really think things out very well. I just do them, which is fine if you're making something you're just going to spend a week on or not finish anyway. If you screw up, you just learn from it. I like learning as I go. I've made some bad mistakes that are now just part of this boat.

Is working on the boat still enjoyable?

It's definitely turned into an obligation, but when I started on the boat I was frying donuts. Everyone is better off if you aren't doing something like that. That summer, I learned a lot more about saving money too. I stopped going to the coffee shop and started eating out of the trash.

Do you have any way to make money while you travel?

I've been wanting to work on my folk music anyway. I started to learn mandolin but only played for a few weeks, so I'll play on the streets and do that thing. I'm taking a bike and a trailer with me so I'll be able to dumpster food.

How much money have you spent?

I'll spend a little less than \$4,000 with the sails and rigging. I had planned for it to take about a year and take around a thousand. Oh well.

Have you done any big projects in the past?

Nothing very big. I've never spent more than a few months on anything. I built an electric bass guitar that took me two or three months.

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It wasn't my first time sailing, but it was my first time sailing on a boat. After two weeks of frantic



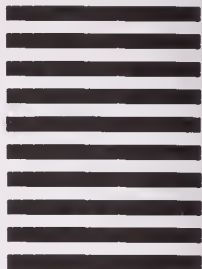
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How many people have helped with the boat?

Well, Rusty has helped with it some, and my brother Tristan has helped with it a lot, especially with all the fiberglassing which is miserable work – it's just fiberglassing, and sanding, and filling, and sanding, and fiberglassing, and sanding, and more sanding. About 15 people helped to flip it over after the bottom had been all fiberglassed and painted.

Have you ever been on a sailboat around the size of the one you're building?

I actually have now. Last summer, I went to visit a friend in Maine. When I started the boat ... about two and a half years ago. I hadn't. My friend, John, went to Maine to go to a wooden boat building school. Not quite like what I'm building, but stuff around that size. When I was a little kid, I visited my mom's ex-boyfriend's old friend who was living on this 50-foot steel boat that he had built in Fort Wayne, where I'm from, but we never went sailing. We just sat next to the dock, but it really impressed me.

Was last summer your first time sailing?

It wasn't my first time sailing, but it was my first time sailing on a boat like the one I'm building.

Did you learn much about sailing?

Well, not so much about sailing. I got an idea of what it's going to be like. Being in Bloomington, Indiana, you don't see many sailboats. You look at mine and it looks pretty big. Being there, I realized it's a very, very, very small boat, and it's going to be rough. We were on a 25-foot fiberglass boat (and I'm hoping my boat is going to be heavier) but it was just like being on a dingy. You just get knocked around like nothing. I also went on a 60-foot boat and it was pretty neat. It was a lot more like what I thought the boat I'm building was going to feel like.

I've got a problem where I don't really think things out very well ... I've made some bad mistakes that are now just part of this boat.

How big is the boat you're building?

It's 25 feet long. Flat bottomed. Fiberglass on plywood.

What are you making the sail out of?

Sails are so ridiculous. In the last fifty years, sails have been made out of polyester or special sail making cloth that's made by people like 3M. It's \$20 a yard, so even to buy the materials and make them yourself it would cost a thousand dollars just for the material without all the fittings and everything. Absolutely nuts. I finally got a book that was written before 1950 on sail making. They used canvas and it worked for five hundred or more years.

Have you spent much time on the water?

Some friends and I built a raft. It was one of the best experiences of my life. I was living with two brothers, John and Dave, and we just decided we're going to go on a raft trip. It was 12 feet wide and 18 to 20 feet long. We had eight people on it. We built it in two weeks in the yard and designed it so we could disassemble it and fit it in a Ryder truck. We drove it down to the Cumberland River and went about a hundred miles on the river. It was so nice. It was just a big, big raft. After two weeks of frantic work, organizing, and rebuilding an old outboard motor to power the thing - so much work and we didn't think it was going to come together - but then got to spend a week relaxing on it.

continued next page



What are your plans for when the boat is done?

That I'm not so sure about. I'm almost afraid of having it done, but I'm really looking forward to going on the first trip with my old friends Chris and John. Originally it was, I'm going to leave town and go live on this boat. I'm not really ready to live on the boat, I don't think. There are all these things I want to do that I can't do right now because I'm working on the boat. I really want to have a lot of people help out with sailing it. I'm hoping it will be easy enough to find people to keep going with the boat when I'm not on it, so I can do other things, then just meet back up with the boat.

If people reading this interview are interested in doing some sailing, would you want them to contact you?

Sure, what the hell, but, I need to get a new email account, so um ... it would also be great if anyone along the East Coast or the Gulf Coast contacted me, and I could look them up if I end up there. (ed. note: you can write Greg at LostAtSea@clamormagazine.org).

Where do you think you'll be going?

Aw geez, I don't know. What I'm planning to do is put in up in Lake Erie, then go out the St. Lawrence Seaway, go around Nova Scotia, all the way down the East Coast, then into the Gulf so I can visit my grandparents, people in Pensacola and people in New Orleans, and maybe down the Mexican coast, but I don't even have any idea how long it will take to sail down the Atlantic Coast.

Are you going to test the boat before you leave?

I think I'm going to take it straight there, just because it's going to be a real chore to get it in the water. I'm not sure how I'm going to do it. The place I rent the trailer from probably won't want me to dip the whole trailer in the water, so I may rig up some sort of rail system or something else.

Have you named the boat yet?

It's probably going to be Charlotte, which is a cat that moved in with us right around when I started the boat. She was going to be my first mate but she had leukemia. She died a few months ago.

Do you ever sleep on the boat and dream of nights at sea?

I've slept on the boat a few times. I was going to be living in it. I rigged up some tarps to keep it dry before I had the deck on. I got the inside pretty well built then I painted it and let it dry. It smelled a little like paint, so I set up a fan to draw air through it and then decided this is where I live now and put all my clothes in and set up my bed. I fell asleep and I woke up in the morning and thought I must have gotten really drunk last night and tried to figure out what I did because I was so dizzy. So I went and drank some water and then went back to sleep in the boat. Then I woke up again a few hours later and couldn't walk straight. After an hour, I realized it was because of all the paint fumes and decided not to sleep in the boat anymore for now. ★

Travel Tale: Where you headin' man?

Hitchhiking used to be my carrier of choice. It was cheap and no more dangerous than any other form of transport. Then something changed. Americans grew more isolated from each other and hitchhikers became synonymous with criminals, even though they were more likely to become the victim of a crime. Tom Robbins' big-thumbed heroine Sissy Hankshaw notwithstanding, in middle America's mind giving someone a ride became tantamount to committing suicide. Nowadays, it's a rare sight to see a thumb of any size asking for a ride on America's highway.

So, how can I bring it alive for someone who has never been out there along the side of the road, thumb up and hoping? You feel like Jack Kerouac, living that line from the Woody Guthrie song that goes "As I walked down that ribbon of highway, I saw below me that endless valley..." You notice the desolation of the prairie road which just goes on and on into the horizon. You head toward the mountains that look so close but take a good day's ride to reach. At dusk, you hear the sound of the lonesome whippoorwill. In midday, the relentless heat of the southwestern desert

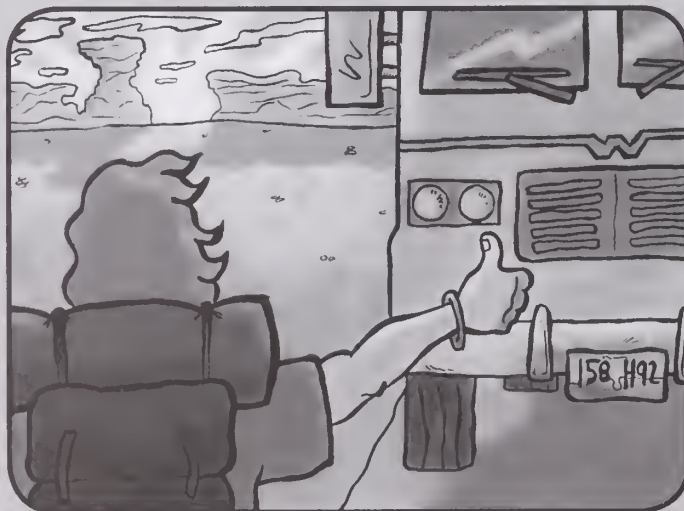
beats on your shoulders and on the eastern highways, the suffocating humidity of the east coast's summer sends beads of sweat down the bridge of your nose. The big eighteen-wheelers that zoom by nearly pulling you into their wake. A rainstorm that comes out of nowhere when there's no shelter in sight and proceeds to split the sky in a light show from the gods that takes your breath away.

Then there was getting picked up by a biker driving a van with his disassembled Harley in the back. He took me home and then out drinking in a bar outside Toledo, Ohio where I scored umpteen million points on the pinball machine while his buddies drove their Harleys through the place. The farmer who didn't pick me up and looked straight

ahead as if I wasn't there. The uptight family man with the "I Love Jesus" bumperstickers who gave me the finger as I stood on a ramp near Chicago's stockyards. The teenage boys driving daddy's car who drove by once and threw a full can of beer at my head. Then, on their second time around, they stopped and urged me to climb in. A nurse who took me home and slept with me that night and the guy with the poodle who tried to.

Once, sleeping by the side of the road near Oklahoma City I awoke in the morning to find an Apache girl at my side. Only trying to keep warm, she said, and keep the snakes away. Two junkies who picked me up near Pueblo, Colorado and were heading to Midland, Texas, man, to score a quarter ounce of Mexican mud heroin. Two pretty teenage girls on their way to Milwaukee from Chicago who wanted me to buy beer for them. We drank until all three of us were so drunk we couldn't drive. When we stopped to straighten out we kept drinking and they said they both wanted to have me but we were all so drunk we just kissed and laughed until we passed out. The car of Jesus freaks in Tennessee who slowed down like they were going to give me a ride then, after I ran a quarter mile to their car, gave me some tracts and pulled away.

-Ron Jacobs



art: Jimmy Bryant

Oba Maja

Chicago street poet travels down the avenue of happiness

This is a story about the infamous street poet Oba Maja from Chicago, an urban folk hero of the city streets, who I met through my travels in the Midwest. I first met Oba Maja in 1997 while doing a performance at the Double Door Lounge in Chicago's Wicker Park district. I was playing with the musical group Universe Crew (based out of Toledo) at the time, and we were set to do a special live show with our producer mentor Adrian Sherwood. It was a cold December night and our nerves were running high, and we were set to deliver our universal message through music and visual art.

Before our performance a tall lanky black man with a rugged coat and hat walked into the club with a stack of poems in his hands for sale. This was quite unique and piqued the interest of the entire group, and we found that this poet, this messenger of spirituality, this figure of the Chicago city streets had a universal message of creativity that was powerful. So we bought some poems and wished him well, shortly after he was whisked out of the club by security and that was the last that we saw of him.

Over a period of many years, inspired by his poems, in an effort to put together a chapbook of his poetry, I would travel back to Chicago seeking out this street poet known as Oba Maja. I searched high and low on the city streets, in Chicago's Wicker Park area, downtown, the north side and the south side but to no avail. Then in spring of 2002 while continuing my search in the Wicker Park area, walking down the street I caught a glimpse of a figure out of the corner of my eye offering poems to passers-by. There he was, Oba Maja, still selling his poems to the people of the Windy City. Unbelievable. It was him in the living flesh with his dynamic manner of survival. It was there on the street that I expressed to him my long-held interest in putting together a chapbook of his poetry, his universal message of creativity. We made a plan to hook up two weeks later at the same time and the same place, and we did, he delivered numerous poems with an uplifting message to encourage all of humanity to travel down the Avenue of Happiness, which became the title of his poetry book. I hooked up with some hardcore brothers who were down with the cause and we printed 200 copies of his book to help the guy out.

When I delivered the first batch of books to sell, Oba gave me some background on his life and inspiration. Oba Maja was born in Birmingham, Alabama in 1943 and moved to Chicago's west side when he was seven years old. He found the city quite exciting and always focused on the art of poetics while observing the humanity of the "Windy City." While in Chicago he would work on his skill creating a message for humanity to be happy, live a splendid life, and realize that we are universal citizens. He would also travel throughout the United States from South to North and East to West, always using Chicago as a base of operations on spaceship earth. While on his breaks from work, he would write poetry over a period of many years and eventually abandon the 9 to 5 fake-job. With full faith in his poetry he hit the streets to sell his work. Commenting on his work in recent years Oba states, "It is not fun to see others suffer and poetry can help bring relief, and make happiness happen...there is a universal consciousness and poetry can help create a world where life is electrified and there is a belief in humanity's power and that the universe is not out of reach, it is here and now"

This story is bittersweet though. My last visit was in the winter of 2003, and Oba was in a bad state to say the least. While walking across the street he was hit by a car, which caused severe damage to his leg. Being a homeless street poet, his conditioned worsened, and now there is a possibility of amputation of his leg due to a lack of medical care. A bittersweet tale of travels down the Avenue of Happiness. While preparing to depart Chicago, Oba told me that he still intends on surviving through the sale of his poetry. He suggested that I take the green train line to see a mural that had been made of Oba by a fellow inspired poet. While on the green line, looking out the window, there it was: the mural of Oba, poems, poems, poems...

Interested in purchasing a copy of Oba Maja's poetry chapbook of 27 poems titled Avenue of Happiness? Send \$6.00 to Jive Bomb Press, P.O. Box 20048, Toledo, Ohio 43620

words **Matthew Donahue**
photos **Yeo**

When Angels Speak of Love

When angels speak of love,
they speak of love for all nations.
They speak of love for children playing in sunlight and
grass not drugs and guns..

When angels speak of love,
they speak of love for people to unify
their differences no matter what color or religion they are.
When angels speak of love, they speak of love for all
people to be happy full of beauty and life.

When angels speak of love,
they speak of love for world harmony.



Hopping Freight

Avail frontman
Tim Barry talks
with *Clamor* about
his love affair with
America's rails

by Dennis Kopic

Tim Barry is the singer for Richmond, Virginia's mighty Avail, and if you've seen them live you know that "mighty" is an appropriate adjective. Tim, fresh off of a European tour, was kind enough to indulge me with a phone interview regarding his experiences and knowledge of freight train hopping.

Okay. So my knowledge of train hopping was previously limited to an episode of "The Simpsons" in which the Simpson family stows away in a boxcar

because Homer refuses to pay an airport tax for a flight. The family spends the day giving a hobo sponge baths in exchange for his colorful stories of lore. I couldn't go into an interview with an experienced freight train rider like Tim with just this, so I checked out a few web sites, finding most very informative, and some merely gore sites. I read magazine articles, which usually sounded a lot like the web sites. And I watched *Planes, Trains, and Automobiles*, but only the portion that deals with trains. And in fact I learned that you can't catch a train in Wichita, "... less'n you're hog or cattle. The people train runs out of Stubbville."

The boxcar floor is at your shoulder and there ain't nothing to catch on to. You run, throw your bag up, jump, and you got your hands trying to grab on to anything and your body is slipping off.

From my research, I learned the various terms of train hopping, like types of railroad cars. Boxcars are easy: giant, box, cars. Gondolas, a convertible boxcar. Piggybacks or *pigs* are the flat cars with semi-truck trailers. Intermodal (IMs), 48s, or *Double Stacks* are the cars with wells for either one or two of the rectangular containers that are usually seen at ports being taken off or placed onto ships. IMs and pigs are high priority trains, i.e., much faster than a “junk train,” a train of mixed freight that is usually low priority. Grain cars are not as tall as boxcars, and have the two visible ladders on either end of the car, and are favored by riders for their “grain porch.”

The *rails* are the railyard workers that from most accounts are willing to help out with track numbers and directions to most people riding the trains. The *bulls* however, are the enforcers. They are the railroad security officers. They do not want people around the yards, the tracks, the trains, or the commodities that are being shipped (although isn't it really *trained*?).

All right. So, I've done some homework. I've purchased a variety of recording equipment and devices and a phone card. I was now ready to call Tim and impress him with my superficially infinite wisdom of train hopping. Tim answers the phone and we're underway – well, not before we hear a 500-foot ore ship sound its horn as it pulls into the Lorain harbor causing the 21st Street draw bridge to open. Tim hears the commotion

through the phone and seems genuinely interested in the events. I explain the industrial nature of Lorain, Ohio, a once booming steel town, to which he begins speculating about the various freight companies that are probably nearby: NS, CSX, ETC, which is a very convenient segue — freight train hopping.

“It's dangerous as fuck!” That's where Tim starts. Derailments? Train wrecks? “No, no. Envision yourself in Acca yard in Richmond Virginia. You're at the West Wye [a wye is where the tracks split, just like a fork in the road] that's the hop-out spot. You crawl up, you hike through the woods, pick off the ticks, get to the spot about 500 yards from the yard, wait eight hours, and finally a southbound train is coming through. And this is what I mean by danger: creeping up, you think it's going slow, but when you start running next to it, you realize that you're sprinting. The boxcar floor is at your shoulder and there ain't nothing to catch on to. You run, throw your bag up, jump, and you got your hands trying to grab on to anything and your body is slipping off.” The “body is slipping off” portion of the story is not so tastefully depicted at Deadtrainbums.com.

Tim's first train hopping experience was in 1993 with two friends, Naomi, who was also experiencing it for her first time and Ronny “Richmond” who was actually from Maryland. Ronny had been the experienced rider and had learned all that he knew about riding from his uncle. The ride was from

continued next page



photo: Jim West (jimwestphoto.com)

It's dangerous as fuck ... creeping up, you think it's going slow, but when you start running next to it, you realize that you're sprinting.

CSX schedules for the East Coast. They don't really help with times, they help with train numbers. Like the Q 403 goes between Richmond and Russell, Kentucky. And you can ask a worker, 'Has the Q 403 come in yet, and if not what track will it be on?'"

"An example of the inconsistency with freight train travel with time: we [referring to Tim and a riding partner, Brent] call it 'the loop.' We get out to Lynchburg, Virginia on Norfolk Southern and we come back on CSX. The CSX line hugs the James River the whole way. It's a beautiful ride. Laying there at 3:30 in the morning, hugging the James River, a full moon, in rolling Virginia hills. One of the most picturesque things I've ever seen in my life. That train took about eight hours to get about 130 or 140 miles. The next time he [Brent] did it with his girlfriend, it took more than over a day. You don't expect 140 miles to take more than 24 hours; they were probably running out of train food."

In addition to the potential for being severed in two or killed (and they usually go hand in hand) by the train, there are also some other things to consider. For example, it's illegal. Depending on who catches you, where you're caught, and what you're doing, the misdemeanor trespass violation for being caught sneaking around Fulton yard waiting for a train could be a federal offense if you've got a fire burning on a stationary gondola. Or maybe you didn't know to "spike the door"

of the empty boxcar you've jumped in, and the initial jerk of the engine 30 cars away slides your car's door shut without any

way out, and it could be weeks or longer before the car is opened. Speaking of that, Tim mentioned that there are some urban legendesque stories that have circulated among the freight riders sub-culture.

Apparently a few years back (and it's *always* a few years back with these kinds of stories) two kids, in the version that Tim has heard anyway, about ten years old, jumped into a boxcar and did not "spike the door" (placing a railroad spike in the door to prevent it from closing and locking from the outside). The train begins and the door slides closed and locks the boys in the boxcar. The freight of this particular car? Beer. And enough to sustain the boys for two weeks before they were found. There are other stories that make it around the rails as well, and they aren't quite as endearing as two fourth graders living off of 18 pallets of Schlitz for two weeks.

Rapes, beatings, murders, and a serial killer all within one organization, and it's not the insert-favorite-"whipping boy"-organization here. Tim explained that the FTRA, or Freight Train Riders of America (or Fuck The Reagan Administration, although that name may be a little dated), was a group of US veterans that began riding freight trains in the 1980s. Recently, the FTRA has been hyped by the media and targeted by law enforcement as a gang. They have been linked to string of victims on the high line between Minneapolis and Seattle that were found dead with their shirts pulled over their heads and their pants around their ankles.

In addition to the "Hell's Angels of the Rails," Tim says that there are a lot of Vietnam veterans that have not adjusted to life back home after the war, rail kids, "weekend hobos," and the migrant workers that travel by freight. "The biggest group is the migrant workers. They don't talk to [the rail] workers.

They have a network, you can look under bridges and if you can read any Spanish at all, it will say so and so was here. I rode this train, here's the best place to hide. Here are the trains that are leaving. The Buckeye yard in Ohio, under the bridge it says, 'Don't stand under this bridge. Go ten feet to your right, it's city property. They can't arrest you for trespassing.' The bridges are full of amazing information."

"Out west, whenever we're on ten [Interstate 10], I'll always 'hobo-spot.' I'm in the van looking at train cars. 'Look! There's like six [migrant workers] on the back of that car!' Tim's hobo-spotting again." Once again we're interrupted by the sound of a ship coming into the harbor and the bridge being drawn, this time it's a large sailboat. Tim derailed mid-thought by the distraction 490 miles away says that he has to be going. He said that he was hoping to ride again soon, "It's sunny and 80 degrees." He may be packing a bag and heading over to the West Wye this weekend. Be cautious of those *streamliners*, they're the ones most likely to roll someone for their train food on a long ride. ☆

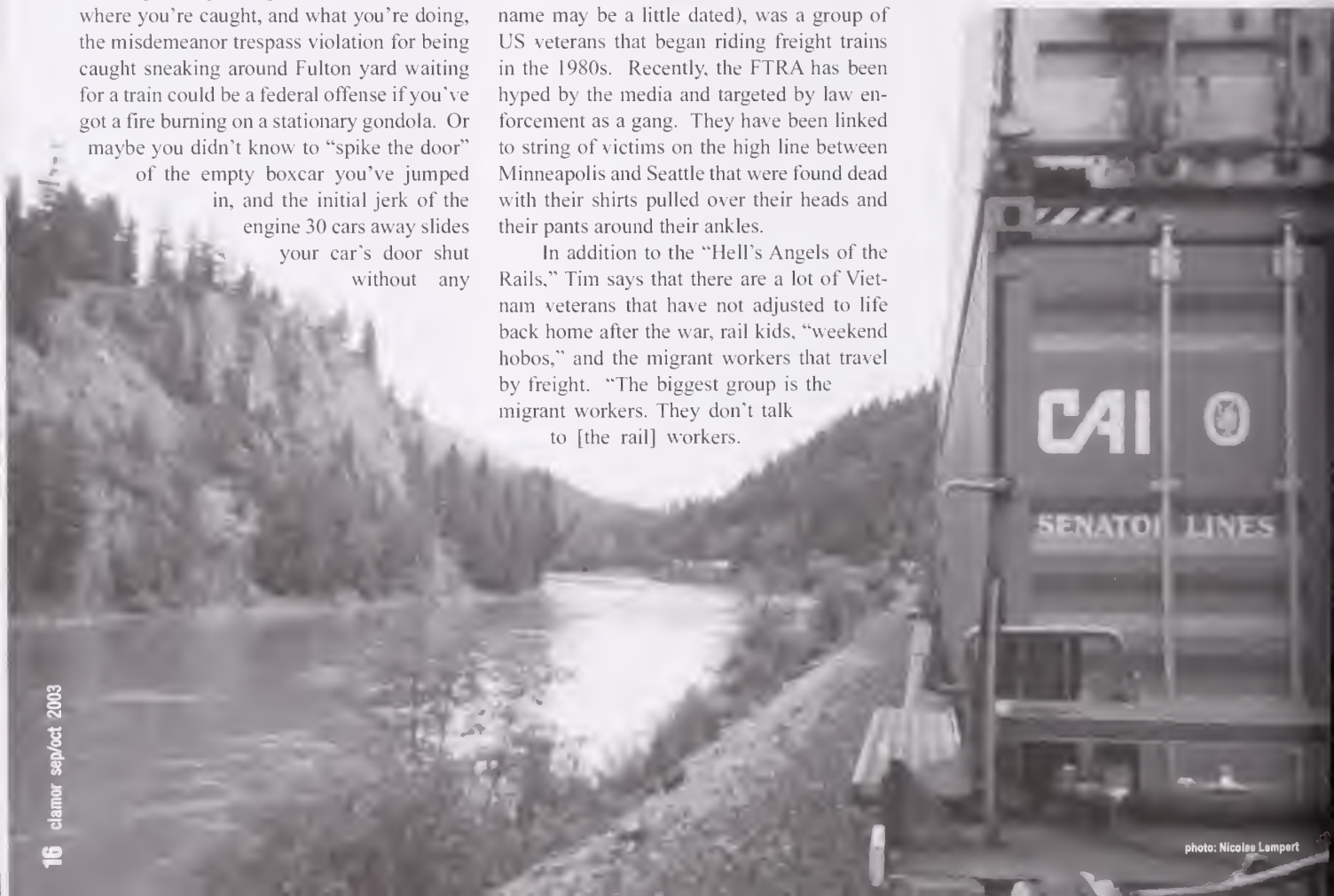
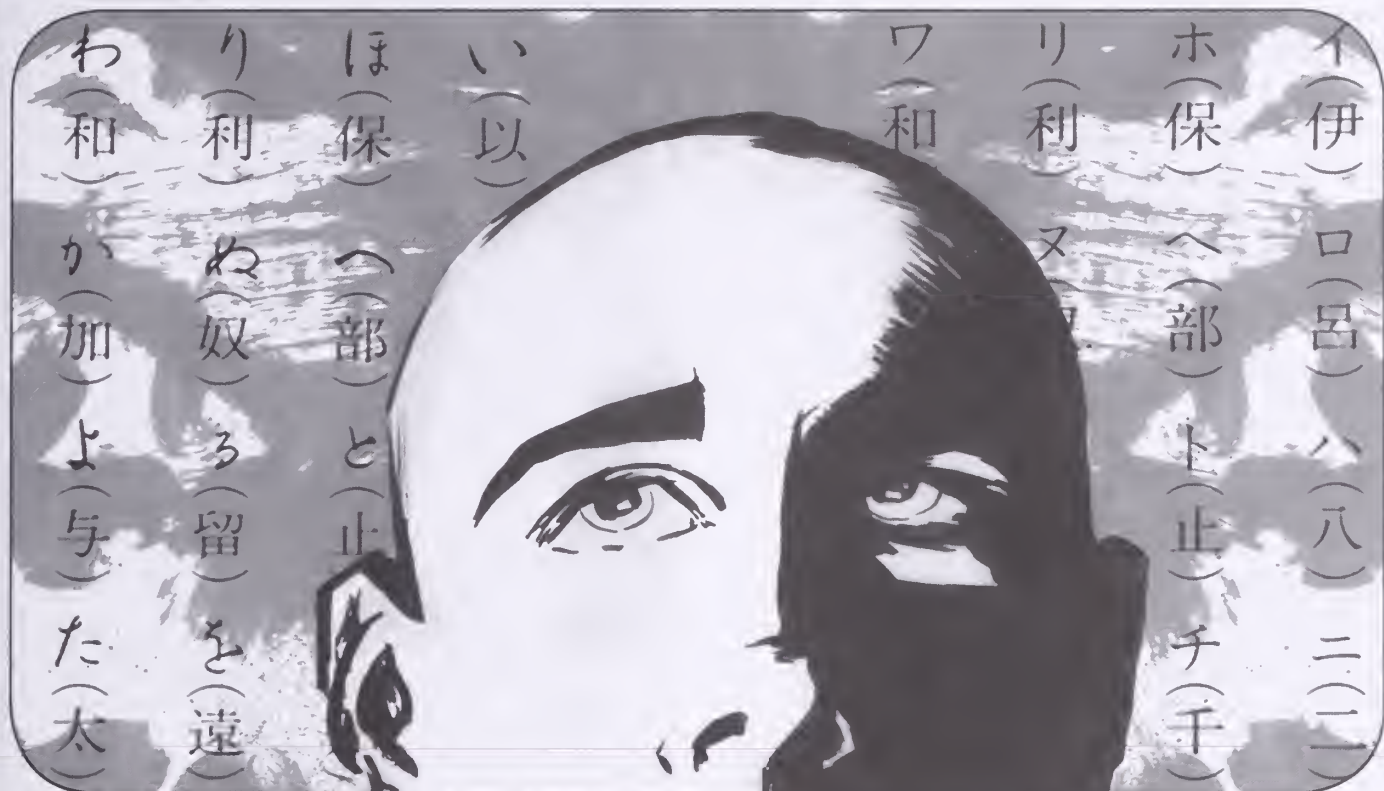


photo: Nicolas Lempert



Teach English Abroad ... Later

Gavin Grant offers some sage advice for anyone planning on teaching english in Japan.

Illustration Erik Rose

After high school, I worked the summer as usual as a gofer at my uncle's business, then very happily went off to university. In my family, it wasn't really a question of if you were going to college — rather, where would you go? I chose a university as far away as I could get, in St. Andrews, but this was Scotland, so it was only 150 miles away. After St. Andrews, I moved to California. I wanted to travel more, but I didn't have specific plans about where, or even how to get there. I like traveling but I didn't want to see foreign countries for just a week or two — I wanted to live abroad. Moving to the U.S. seemed like an easy first move; after all, we speak nearly the same language, but culture shock sneaks up on you — chips! Chocolate! TV!

Five or six years later, I was still thinking about living overseas. When I was in university, I realized the best way to travel was to find a job abroad. (I didn't really apply the concept — unless a summer being a jack-of-all-trades at a hotel in the south of England counts? — but I still thought it was a good idea.) In the back of my mind, I'd been thinking about teaching English in Japan, and I began to wonder if they wouldn't want me if I waited too long.

The great thing about teaching English as a second language (or French, German, Spanish, etc.) is that the company pays you for something you already know how to do: speak your own language! I began telling friends and family I was going to go to Japan to teach English. Not surprisingly they didn't really believe me, even when I began taking an adult education class in Japanese. Since I didn't have the time or money (or, truthfully, the inclination) to get the TOEFL (Teaching of English as a Foreign Language) certification that a lot of Japanese companies wanted, I thought it might help if I had some ESL teaching experience, so I began volunteering at Boston Public Library.

Another year later, I quit my job, packed as much of my stuff as I could carry (and then some!), and booked a one-way ticket to Japan. What I didn't know then was that the best age to go to Japan to teach English is actually your 40s! I was (only) 28 and before I went I'd been afraid

that I'd be too old. When I arrived in Osaka, I discovered how wrong I'd been. The people who were having the most fun were those whose minds were flexible and most open to new experiences: I was really surprised to see that these were usually the older people. I've heard it numerous times — and I've repeated it ad nauseam to my friends (sorry!) — that many people spend their early twenties being incredibly formal. They're trying to shuck off their childhood and teenage years by wearing suits, working hard, and just about saluting their bosses. Then they hit their late twenties and early thirties and begin to learn how to relax and let their child and teenage sides out again. There are hundreds of high schools all turning out great students — hell, some of them even graduate — but not everyone gets to be a rock star or the president. Someone has to run the local library, work at the laundrette, open a new pizza shop. So there I was in Japan, learning the language, meeting some of the friendliest people in the world, and then there were all these straight-out-of-college kids who just knew they were on their way up, and, wow! Get out the way! Couldn't you see me coming? Why're you just standing there? Huh? Old people! I don't know! And off they would go: they were on the way to the top — wasn't their fault if you were in their way.

Not all the 21-year-olds I met were like that. Some were fine — especially those mellow Australians! They settled in, relaxed, and enjoyed themselves. But those stick-up-the-backside few ... good god! If there wasn't a fast food outlet they recognized within a hundred yards of their school, they were just about ready to run away home — and didn't we wish they would! "Dammit, the Big Macs are smaller here!" "Shakey's Pizza? You can't be serious! Where's the nearest Pizza Hut?"

You're in Japan, I wanted to say. Well, I wanted to take them out back and shake some sense into them, but let's pretend I just wanted to talk to them. "Look," I'd say, "try the convenience store to-go lunches, they're an unexpected delight." Or, "Let's go to the izakaya on the eleventh floor of that building across from the Sony Tower." If I did drag them up to one of the tiny restaurants high above the long covered-over streets, they'd

order corn on the cob, potatoes, and chicken, and swear that Popeye's was better. Maybe they forgot that sushi was served in their college cafeteria. I'd be lucky if I could persuade them to leave their shoes in the racks provided.

There's something about coming out of college, or maybe being uptight, 21, and the type of person who decides the world needs to listen: travel is wasted on them.

When you travel 18 hours on a plane with 500 other people and land in a country where 120 million people are squeezed in tight, you have to relax. You'll work in a city where people have lived for thousands of years, where kids stop in the street to watch open-mouthed as you walk by, where you can't understand a word being said, where for hundreds of years everyone has known the best place in the country to be on each of the national holidays. Where you're just another tourist. And if you don't think you can deal with that, maybe staying at home and taking that 120-hour-a-week lawyer job is for you.

Sad to say, the narrow-minded viewpoint wasn't limited to any one country. For a month or two, I had a terrible Canadian roommate who was so insecure I never asked his age. I'd guess around 21 or 22. He was wound so tight if he'd been plugged into the power grid he could have run all the pachinko arcades in the country for a week. He woke up angry: angry at the shower for not being like the one at his (parent's) house, angry at the Japanese-style bread, angry at his inability to recognize anything in this foreign world, angry that he had to teach these foreigners English. Everyone wondered why he was there. His family was Chinese, so he was often asked if he spoke Japanese or Chinese, which, of course, just drove him further up the wall. I hadn't heard as much swearing since I watched "The Young Ones" — and he wasn't half as funny.

It wasn't just the language that was different in Japan — and that's different enough! There are two somewhat similar alphabets, katakana and hiragana, and then there are kanji. Those are characters that are similar to, but different from, Chinese characters. There are thousands of them, and some of them have multiple meanings. To get by in basic Japanese you'd need to learn about a thousand kanji. More educated Japanese learn maybe 3,000. If you want to read Mishima Yukio, get ready to learn something like 9,000!

What else is different? The streetlights, the teapots, the fast food (although there is a(n) (un)healthy scattering of all the familiar brands), the shops, the cars (they drive on the wrong (British) side of the road!), the books, newspapers, and magazines. Glasses, doors, windows, subways and trains (efficient and widespread!), bars, paper, pens! Fashions, socks, shoes! It's a foreign country, which is marvelous, but, if you aren't ready for it, it just hurts.

Don't let me stop you from going. If you're curious, go, but remember: you are going to go hungry; you'll order something at a restaurant and you'll hate it; you'll run out of money and get angry at the cash machine (if there are any) which closes at 11 PM; you'll miss the last train; misunderstand everyone; discover taxes you didn't know you had to pay; pay exorbitant prices for books you wouldn't look at back home; miss the stupid programs on TV that you laughed at your friends for watching; discover phones are the wrong color and hard to find; try and try but mostly fail to connect to the Internet.

Then: you'll find a great Internet cafe; discover a TV program like "Iron Chef"; fall in love; find a used book shop; get excellent presents for people back home; find the way into people's hearts is to learn some of their language (Konichi-wa!); find a good bar close to home; eat great food; and make good friends.

What you do after school is important, but it's neither the most important part of your life nor the most important thing in the world for you — or anyone else. What school doesn't prepare you for is the amount of time you have when you leave. You can change your mind every year, every decade, every month. Every day. It's up to you to be open-minded and discover where you enjoy being. If that's abroad, remember to relax and enjoy it. ★

Travel Tale: On the Road With My Brother



Approaching our seventh hour of Wyoming driving, the sun making the ice in our Taco John's cups melt and the dashboard dangerously hot, I turned to my brother and asked, "Do you think there are more toenails or trees in the world?"

A valid question, but one that seems quite absurd if you don't have any heartland road trippin' under your belt. My brother, ever the earnest poet, didn't blink an eye and responded, "Trees, I think trees, but let me think more about this. Wait, what about cows or toenails?" I was stumped.

These are the kinds of revelries that fill hours in a real American road trip. Pondering the un-urgent questions becomes standard. Wondering about the minutiae of living, dwelling on old memories you didn't even consider memorable, mining topics until they are decimated — this is the valuable stuff of spending hours and hours in a car with an old friend (in my case, a really old one considering he is my big brother).

Last summer, as we made our way around almost 75 percent of the Wyoming border, then into South Dakota, and on to Minnesota, we had plenty of time to remember our forgottens. Both having been born and raised in the geographically expansive and politically narrow Colorado Springs, we rushed to the metropolis (in my case New York, in his San Francisco) as soon as we could, hungry for the urban claustrophobia and open mind of the city streets. But now, at this moment amongst the forever-going fields of Wyoming yellow and the occasional Star Wars-esque power plant, we are remembering what so good about nowhere.

Nowhere is, actually, where everything is. Your mind is here. Unlike that jet-setting week in Barcelona on spring break with friends, drinking and dancing your consciousness away (trust me, I've been there) this is where your perspective dwells. Nothingness reminds me how insignificant my life is, how important the questions about toenails and trees really are in the grand scheme of things. I think about Brianna Boyer in the first grade, how she vomited after accidentally swallowing her Lee Press on Nail in gym class and how I helped her walk to the office and told her not to be embarrassed. I'm really glad I did that. My brother directs the music selection while he drives, trying to introduce me to his latest favorites, in the way big brother's will, and I am reminded of being 16 years old and wishing I could know half as much as he did, be half as brilliant and unafraid. If only I would smoke pot, I remember thinking, then he would want to hang out with me more. We wonder about love. Should we worry if we are unsure? Does practicality make it less perfect?

I re-remember my brother once telling me when I was ten years old that there are more planets in the universe than grains of sand on earth. The enormity of it literally made my mind shut down. But now, as I watch the beautiful Badlands stretch across my window and a hundred mini-vans roll by with little feet pressed on car window glass, I can almost imagine how small I am. How big my love for my brother and these moments are.

—Courtney E. Martin

Black Eyes

Self-titled
Q and Not U
Different Damage
Dischord Records
www.dischord.com



Black Eyes

It's somehow fitting that my first experience with both of these bands in concert was in a church. They conjure a feeling among an audience that what is being experienced is more than just a rock show: it is a ceremony, a collective celebration. Not just of music or art, but of life. Thank the pulsating, booty-shake inducing rhythm sections of both for laying down the serious groove, and the various singers/lyricists for calling everyone together like the show and the record is a sermon.

What Black Eyes and Q and Not U share is a sound loosely traced to the punk-funk progenitors Gang of Four. The sound oozes danceable beats laced with slashing guitars and sung/screamed/rapped words delving into the realms of the political, the personal, and the nonsensical. It is not uncommon in this post-Strokes day and age to hear scores of bands with a similar shrine built to the Four. Yet Black Eyes and Q and Not U separate themselves from the pack by building songs on a concrete foundation of memorable melodies and (usually) lyrics that actually mean something.

cacophonous barrage, which can include anything from garbage cans to pots and pans. Consult the near-industrial Missing Foundations-esque introduction to "On the Sacred Side" for further proof.

Q and Not U also offer two vocalists, though both stick to more traditional singing/screaming, one focusing more on the melody, the other to the rage. Still, both transcend most singers in this genre and compliment one another perfectly. Shorn down from a four-piece to a trio, the change in line-up has done nothing to diminish the group's attack or imagination. *Different Damage* soars past the band's debut *No Kill Beep Beep*. The songs are even more unbelievably catchy and powerful. Some flat out rock ("Everybody

Listening to Black Eyes' debut album can sometimes bring to mind Public Enemy. The rhythms can go from tribal to hip-hop. one guy sings and shouts, while another squeaks, squalls, brays, howls and shrieks. The latter at times can sound like the comic foil a la Flavor Flav to the former's Chuck D. The two sometimes overlap and contradict one another, and then meet up to punch home whatever topic is within their aim. More times than not, the vocals become maniacal, like a caged animal gnashing its teeth on the bars. Credit the dual drummer attack for the

Ruins," "When the Lines Go Down") while others meander in a dub beat ("Air Conditioner") or into surreal terrain ("O'No," "Snow Patterns").

Lyrical, both have their fingers on the pulses of the political. Q and Not U sing about "Black kites at night, they make me nervous," while Black Eyes demand to know "Who's got their hands on the long black guns?" Themes of work and technology appear in Q and Not U's lyrics, such as the proclamation that "We're working in a coma for a cheque and a chance," while others will "Text your message through the vines. Born without anytime minutes to lose." Black Eyes state "This kiss is not a poison. This kiss is not a prison," and then "Someone will kill you for a secret kiss."

What we have here are two bands out to raise the bar of current rock music, independent or otherwise. That they are (at least as of this writing) operating within the independent circuit is a testament to the vibrancy of non-commercial music. Their new albums offer a ray of hope that music can and should remain challenging, exciting, inspiring and fun.

-Casey Boland



Q and not U

Rebuttal

Below Zero
Purple Sock Recordings, 2003
psrecordings@hotmail.com

David Glosinski and John Gerlach are craftsmen. As songwriters, musicians, engineers, and producers their key artistic niche is layering. On their latest release, *Below Zero*, their fourth record on their label Purple Sock Recordings, Glosinski and Gerlach have figuratively packed up an RV with the kitchen sink and journeyed into the subtler strata of musical narrative.

Alumni from the revered Boston-based band Bob Evans — Glosinski on guitar and vox and Gerlach on drums — the pair have spent the past six years collaborating via US mail. Glosinski sends reels to Gerlach from Seattle, and Gerlach responds with his reels from Minneapolis. Each in their own home recording studio, additions are made to the original and exchanged again. In preparation for the next release, the pair team up yearly for an intensive session of mixing. *Below Zero* was mixed in spring of 2003, and

was finished after a marathon of nights was spent hand silk-screening the CD covers.

Aptly named Rebuttal, the duo is unafraid of incorporating any medium that inspires them. On *Below Zero* they imbed samples of dialogue, sequence drums and piano, and dabble in electronica, all the while capitalizing on their collective emo rock history without tangling themselves in a comfort zone. Gerlach strongly embraces his pop leanings, while Glosinski examines melody. The result is true craft.

"We both share a love for arranging and producing, which really is the crux of what we do," says Glosinski. "The final mixing process is the most rewarding and grueling. But that is

where our differences in style are fused with a similar idea of how a song should sound."

Although the bigger crunch of Bob Evans can be spotted in Rebuttal's discography, Gerlach and Glosinski have lowered the volume and modernized influences for *Below Zero*. Songs like "Terms and Conditions," which explores how our culture expends humans in war, is a stroll of walking bass lines and perky electronica lined with a chorus of drums, electronic violins, distorted guitar, and samples. "Utility," the opening track on *Below Zero*, is an infectious rock song reminiscent of The Replacements in the *All Shook Down* era.

For the listener, the genius hidden in *Below Zero* is the emergence of a breathtaking sonic image. Glosinski feels the creative impetus came from reflecting on their individual histories. "It is a reaction," he says of the record, "to some of the political issues surrounding our country. The record feels sad and yet hopeful to me."

As Glosinski prepares for graduate school, Gerlach is busy in Minneapolis managing his cooperative coffee house and publishing his zine *Breakfast Served All Day*. When asked about how two such different songwriters work in tandem, both answer similarly.

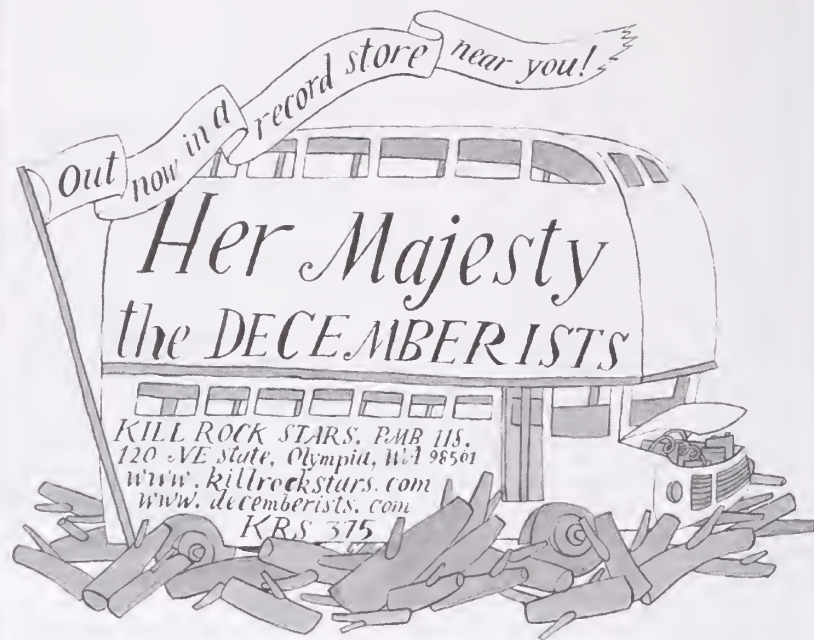
"When we are successful in blending our styles," offers Glosinski, "it is because we take into consideration that one song is part of a collective. And rather than trying to step on the others work, we compliment one another."

-Tess. Lotta



REVIEW Rebuttal

"This is a band with about a thousand-and-a-half layers of musical genius, and that's sort of @#%!ing awesome."
—Pitchfork



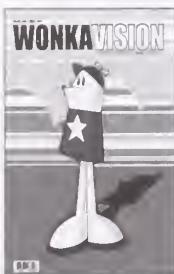
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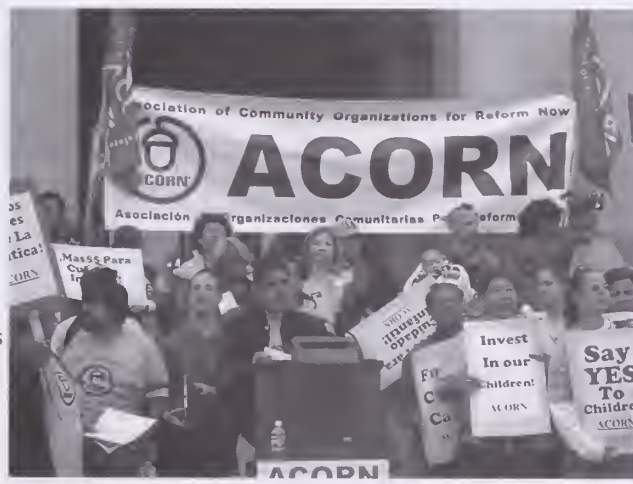
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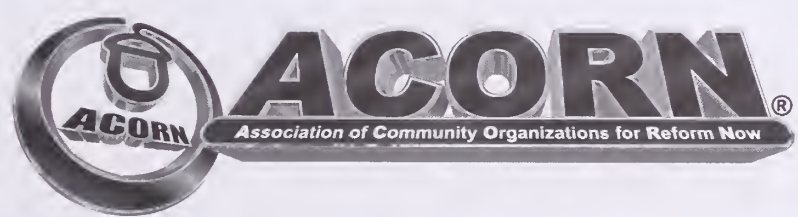


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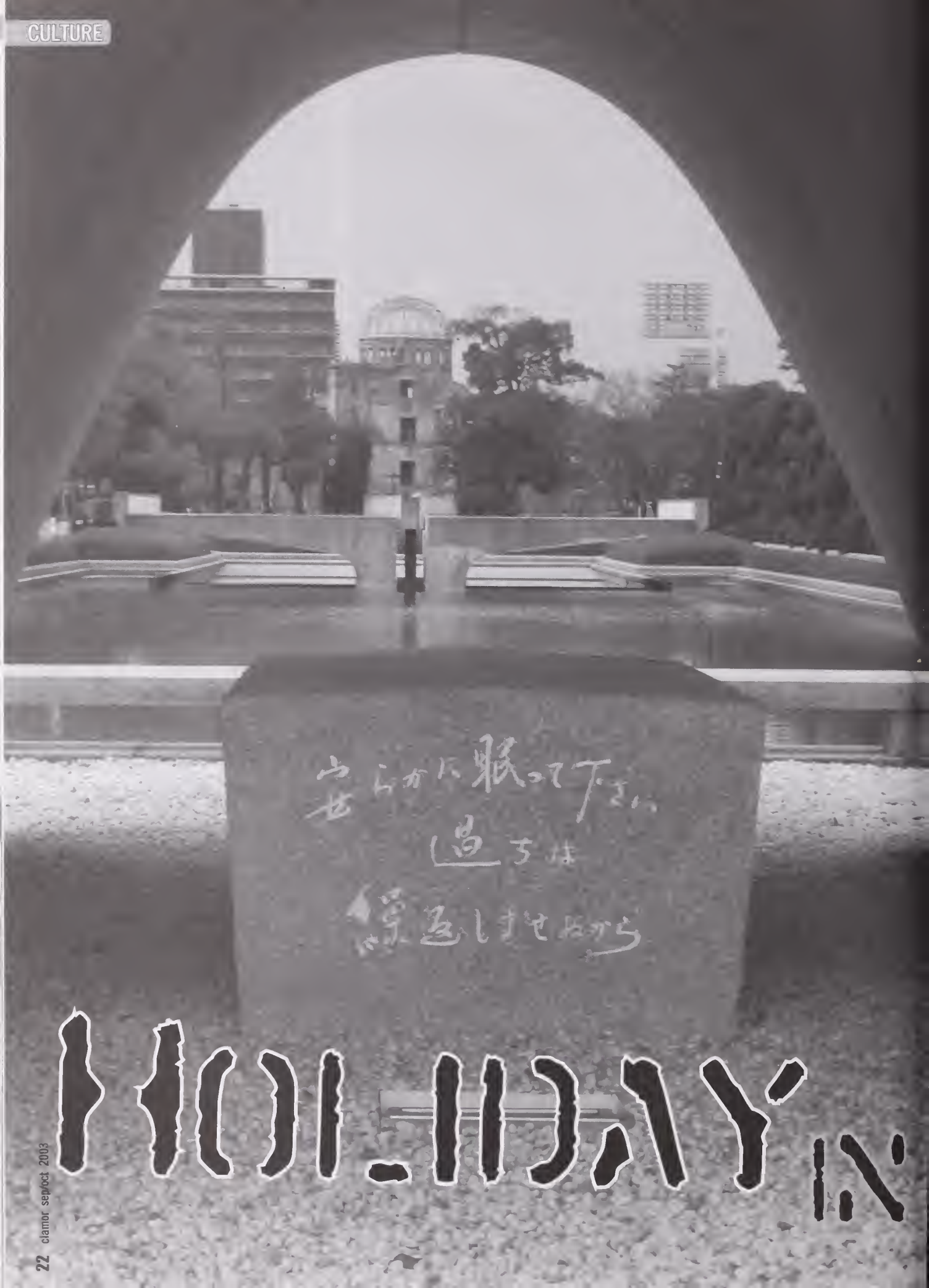
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安らぎに眠る下
 昌子様
 静かに眠る方へ

トコロナク

“There is something you need to know,” he states, a look of life-or-death seriousness coloring his face like an ominous shade of crayola. “Do not go outside alone. If you need to go anywhere, make sure you are with one of us.” This sends a shiver down my spine. “Where we are in the city is the *yakuza*. They know there will be Americans here tonight. We must be very careful.”

This was the last thing I expected in Hiroshima.

We’d been joking about *yakuza* the entire trip. Members of the Japanese punk rock band we traveled with insisted that their bass player, Naka, a rather quiet fellow, was a card-carrying member of the infamous Japanese Mafia. But never did we really think that insignificant American musicians like us would appear on the radar of the Mafioso.

Dai leads the way across the bridge. He mans the drums in the band we tour with. Indeed, a punk band brings me to Japan. That’s over 6,000 miles from home. The only thing more mind-boggling to me about this entire trip is the fact that punk rock paid for my ticket. Certainly there must be something amiss in the galactic scheme of it all when me, a twenty-something guy from Philly, finds himself traversing Japan with a band and the plane fare paid for by the band.

The smell hangs heavy, an aroma that reminds me of my childhood in a seashore town. “What do you think of the cherry blossoms?” Dai asks. Many Japanese we meet query us on their beloved cherry blossoms, now in bloom. And each city we’ve been to boasts them and their fragrance. Nagoya, Yokohama, Sendai, Kyoto, Osaka. I peer down at the river below. It remains static, dead. Its brown color belies the life blooming beneath the surface.

Hiroshima not only looks different than anywhere else we’ve been, it feels different. Perhaps it’s due to the fact that this is the furthest south and west we will go. I see palm trees, mountains all around just beyond the buildings, water everywhere. They call it the “city of rivers.” It’s also warmer here, with the chill of early spring still infecting the western part of the country. The rain ceases temporarily to allow rogue rays of sunshine to sneak down upon us. Our entire trip is a test in keeping dry. This must be the rainy season.

This is no Tokyo. That city feels like walking in a Japanimation video — a crazy, dizzying orgy of neon colors. The city is visually loud, vibrant and alive in ways no city in the U.S. can ever be. I felt like we wandered amidst a terrain not unlike Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner* or William Gibson’s *Necromancer*, just a kinder, gentler, family-friendly version of both. We only explored it briefly, yet it still left the indelible impression that it is a strange form of sane madness, as if some order contained the chaos. As we’d see in every city, Japan clearly exists ten years ahead of the U.S., with its technology and pace and culture. And did I mention the cleanliness? If we saw one stray plastic bag tiptoeing in the wind down the street it’d be unusual. I saw no police and at no time felt the need for them.

As we look at the buildings of Hiroshima, we can’t help but feel as if this city is so much older than its infrastructure really is. But it

isn’t. And every second we are here, I can’t help but realize what my country did to this city 58 years before. 58 years.

We make our way towards the trolley. Half of our party already departed for the monument and museum. I shuffle through my pocket to procure the necessary fare. I have a handful of I yens, which, like the American cent, is almost worthless. We buy our tickets from a machine (Dai doing the work since none of us can read it) and soon hop on the trolley.

I hold on tight as the trolley rumbles down a wide street, which cuts through downtown Hiroshima. And then we get off and approach Peace Park. Dai, Naka and Ogawa lead the way. We come upon a building, clearly the victim of the bombing. Dai explains: “This is the A-Bomb Dome. This was the Hiroshima Prefecture Industry Promotion Hall. The bomb exploded above it.” In fact, the bomb detonated to the southeast of the A-Bomb Dome. It went off in the sky some 580 meters above. The blast created wind speeds of 440 meters per second. The blast pressure was 35 tons per square meter. Everyone in the building was instantly vaporized. Though the roof disintegrated, the rest of the building remained. It has been preserved as a reminder of that day. All of us are stunned that the building withstood the blast.

Dai makes it a point to explain the specifics and the horror of the bombing. I wonder if he feels obligated to impress upon us, as Americans, what happened. And I could tell him, “Hey man, we know. They teach us about this in school.” But as we see with our own eyes the devastation wrought by our country, each one of us can’t help but feel remorse and regret. Not that we had any say in the matter since most of our parents weren’t even alive in 1945. Yet we stand here in front of this casualty of our country’s actions as the representatives of that country.

Across another bridge we go. This arches over the Motoyasu River. It is presumed that the bomb exploded directly overhead. We come upon the Cenotaph for the A-Bomb Victims Memorial. When we walk all the way to the other side, Dai shows us the placement of the monument. Through the arch you can see the A-Bomb Dome. The monument itself represents an ancient house and is intended to protect the souls of those killed in the bombing from the rain.

Across from this stands the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. Naka says, “The museum is closed. But we will see if we can get permission to enter anyway.” A short time later they wave us inside.

We are restricted to the first floor. Several rooms feature artwork portraying scenes from the terrible day, with explanations. As I ingest each, I feel overcome with grief and anger. Portraits of charred mothers with half-alive babies crying on their backs. Children melted into the street. Parents rushing their burned offspring to the river, not realizing that dunking them in the water will kill them. I look at my fellow band members, fellow Americans, and see a similar emotion upon their faces.

As we walk outside, no one says anything. Finally Billy quips, “That was fun, huh?” We chuckle, and discuss what we’ve seen.

HIROSHIMA

words Casey Boland photos Jeff Kane

Someone asks, "Do you think they needed to drop the bomb?" I state, "There's evidence that Truman knew the Japanese were going to surrender and let them bomb anyway," I say "as a sign to the Russians that we had this weapon and we would use it." "I don't know," he says. "I want there to be some meaning to what we did here." Of course, the official U.S. reason for the bombing is that it prevented the loss of American troops that would have presumably died in a ground offensive. Hiroshima harbored military and munitions facilities (most other Japanese cities had already been leveled). A more complete analysis would include government considerations that use of the bomb would display U.S. might and assure U.S. dominance.

The Japanese surely disagree with those who would stop fearing the bomb and learn to love it. Judging by the various plaques, monuments and artwork inside, Hiroshima exists to protest nuclear weapons and war. It labels itself Peace City. Every year on August 6, the mayor delivers a peace address. I wonder if American politicians have ever set foot in this city and seen its painfully blatant reminders of the consequences of weapons of mass destruction.

The entire time we are in this area of the city, I hear a voice loudly speaking. I first heard it when we left the trolley and thought it was a voice message over a PA system reprimanding me for not paying or departing properly or something. As we wander towards the trolley, I see the source of this voice. A rally takes place in a park near the A-Bomb Dome, with people making speeches. Once we're upon it, someone hands me a flier. They smile, and I say "Thank you." I look down and read: "Stop the War on Iraq." I suddenly remember that we've heard no news about this "war" since we've been in Japan.

How could we? I've found no English newspapers and we haven't stayed anywhere with a TV. Today is April 7. Up to this point, I'd wondered if the whole affair was over, American troops triumphantly trouncing the Iraqis. This rally made it clear the fight was still on.

A new speaker gets up, and talks in English. She is a member of ANSWER (Act Now to Stop War and Racism) and is one of two Americans here to deliver speeches. It is a sobering spectacle, this event, occurring in this proximity. Have our leaders learned nothing in the past 50 years? Apparently not. Approximately 140,000 people died in the atomic blast over Hiroshima in 1945. Countless more would die for equally dubious reasons since, and yet the murder continues, this time on the other side of the world in Iraq. And for what? Strategic power? Control of the Middle East oil supply? A 2004 presidential campaign ploy? As a demonstration that the U.S. is still numero uno? It is a sad state of affairs, and all the more heart-wrenching as I stand upon the soil of a city decimated by my country.

Two nations crippled by the self-proclaimed standard bearer of freedom and democracy, in the name of freedom and democracy.

I remember our first day in Tokyo, frequenting a bank to exchange our dollars for yen. Someone asked Tetsu, the singer of our fellow Japanese band, what the Japanese think of their president. He responded, with a wry smile, "Ah, they don't like him. He is unpopular. He supports George Bush and his war. Many Japanese do not." And then I think of that raucous night in Kyoto when Dai asked me, "So what are these 'freedom potatoes'?" Or even a year before, while in Germany, when a Norwegian asked me, "Why are you letting George Bush get away with this?" I defended myself by claiming I did not vote for the guy. But is that any excuse? At some point, our leaders must be made accountable.

This is, after all, allegedly a democracy.

And I think of the criminally ignored epitaph inscribed on the Cenotaph for the A-Bomb Victims Memorial: "Let all the souls here rest in peace; For we shall not repeat the evil." ☆



Heathens

in the

Land of the Holy Monkeys

ASS-KICKING



Cherishing the little things life has to offer in Pushkar

The best thing about our Pushkar digs was the band of black-faced white monkeys who hung out on the roof. Pushkar is India's second holiest city and don't think those monkeys don't know it. Thanks to their address, they enjoy complete immunity. No matter how calculated and deplorable their antics, the devout must treat them as Brahma's favored lap dogs. Many entertaining hours were spent watching the monkeys hurl fistfuls of tiny white candy onto the heads of the pilgrims who had come to make *puja* — Hindu worship or prayer — on the banks of Lake Pushkar. I suppose it was a mitzvah of sorts, since the candy played a part in the religious ritual. They were made from sugar, rose essence and the water taken directly from the lake, according to the young Brahmin who made his living coaching backpackers through the *puja* ceremony. His friend helped Greg through a *puja* in honor of his late father, Stanley, who had nearly died of dysentery bumming around India some twenty years before his sons were born. I selected my maternal grandmother, Elva Brockway, to be the recipient of my bungling attempt at Hindu observance, mostly because the candy's taste made me nostalgic for the violet perfume she gave me as a child. Laying aside the question of reincarnation, I couldn't help thinking that Gran, a Hoosier Presbyterian whose most exotic excursion was a spin on San Francisco's Rice-o-Roni street car, would have been scandalized by these heathen ministrations. Picturing her clutching her pocketbook firmly to her chest, I launched a cardboard boat bearing a flickering candle across the surface of Lake Pushkar as a monkey behind me the size of an outboard motor swiped more packets of candy than he could carry.

The monkeys weren't the only creatures to share the ersatz patio outside our quarters, a small adobe-type cubicle built directly onto the flat roof. The family who owned this house, living in the rooms that opened onto the parquet-tiled courtyard, had a small, tan dog, a friendly-faced mutt whom everyone ignored. Homesick for Jambo, our contemptuous pet cat back home

by Ayun Halliday

excerpted from *No Touch Monkey! And Other Travel Lessons Learned Too Late* (Seal Press, November 2003)

in Chicago, we adopted the eager-to-please little fellow, whom we called Doggiepants. I think Doggiepants was relieved to have some human allies, since the monkeys used him as their whipping boy. He'd be napping on the *charpoy*, a surprisingly comfortable wooden cot-frame with a mattress of criss-crossed strings, when three or four monkeys would bound over the wall and shamle over in the time-honored tradition of bullies the world 'round. While we watched, one of the simian toughs — always a medium-sized henchman, never the biggest one — would grasp Doggiepants by the scruff and fling him unceremoniously overboard. Like a terrified freshman unsure if he was free to go, Doggiepants would tremble at a safe distance as the monkeys lounged, chattering on the stringbed with a dozen of their pals. "It's okay, Doggiepants," we'd croon, gathering him into our arms. "They'll go away soon and then you can have your spot back." We weren't foolhardy enough to challenge the usurpers on his behalf. We were three times their size, but they outnumbered us. If they whistled, hundreds of long-tailed, opposable-thumbed relatives would come flying from the neighboring rooftops. They were buff, aggressive, familiar with the terrain, and beloved to Brahma. They were unparalleled specimens of Grade-A-Prime ass-kicking monkey flesh. Greg and I adored them. We loved Doggiepants, too, but he was like us, weak.

Pushkar has a well-earned reputation as Rajasthan's favorite backpackers' haunt. While Jaipur has exquisite miniature paintings and Jodhpur has the forts, Pushkar is easy. It's easy to navigate on foot, its narrow streets all leading back to the lake. Restaurants are plentiful, as are stalls where even the most tentative bargainer can snag a silk blouse cut from a second hand *sari* for less than a buck. Naked *sadhus* (Hindu wandering holy men) patrol the streets, as dignified as elderly lions. It's an Indian vacation within India, a temporary reprieve from the big city *baksheesh* (money given as a tip, a present, or alms) and the exhausting tourist hustle of other picturesque spots. Pushkar gets a fair share of Indian visitors, too, devout Hindus, some of whom are but cremated remains. Varanasi, the famous city on the banks of the Ganges, is the primo ash-scattering spot, but according to both *Lonely Planet* and the Brahmin who conducted the *puja* for Gran-Gran, Lake Pushkar was good enough for Gandhi and that, my friends, is good enough for me, particularly if you toss in a couple thousand monkeys.

The dark side of Pushkar's legend, which in my case turned out to be absolutely true, is that you will get sick there. It caught me by surprise. Having remained relatively healthy for five years as a succession of traveling partners liquefied internally, dropping weight by the bucketful, I had decided my bout with malaria in Tanzania had left me impregnable to any number of bugs. It also seemed to be the origin of my insomnia, but whereas my nights are miserable, moth-eaten affairs to this day, my intestinal Get Out Of Jail Free card expired on the roof of the Brahmaputra guesthouse on the shores of Lake Pushkar. If I might be allowed a note of scatological explanation, all travelers undergo some transformation of their customary bowel function, otherwise how could they join in the lurid shit-story one-upsmanship that passes for polite mealtime conversation with others of their ilk? I was no exception, even after Africa laid me low. There is a difference, however, between the garden variety tummy trouble one encounters on the road and the miserable, cramping, Everything-I-Eat-Comes-Pouring-Out-My-Ass ordeal that I endured in Pushkar. It's a testament to that city's easygoing quality that I was still able to spend a couple

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of hours every day exploring its petal-strewn streets. When it was time to stay within certain toilet range, I returned to our room on the roof of the Brahmaputra to snuggle with Doggiepants and lean on the foot-thick windowsill, gazing at pilgrims prostrating themselves on the blue-tiled landing of the temple next door. Once, an enormous milk-colored ox found his way out onto the temple's *ghat* (flight of steps) and wreaked havoc by leaning on the faithful. They scrambled away shouting before he could crush them against an ornamental pillar, but no matter how hard they whacked him on the buttocks, he refused to leave. He reminded me of my stepfather's dearly departed black lab, a loyal beast whose intelligence I always found somewhat overestimated. That dog used to lean against me so heavily on the dock of Art's summer home in northern Wisconsin that I invariably wound up in Lake Superior, another paper-

back novel waterlogged to thrice its original size. Doggiepants aside, my temperament marked me as a cat person. If you ask a cat person to choose between cow and monkey, the bovine loses every time, unless the judging takes place in a barbecue pit and looking at that bull's loose hide, I doubted he'd make good eating, even if his mental thermostat was set to poultry. A furious matron in a lime-green sari had him by the nose ring, screaming directly into his nostrils and the dumb ox just stood there, swishing his tail. Any one of the monkeys vaulting overhead would have torn her head off for such insubordination. Nandi the Bull might have been Shiva's trusty vehicle, but Hanuman, King of the Monkeys, was Vishnu's right hand man.

"Why do you think it is that there are a bazillion temples to Ganesha and barely any to Hanuman?" I asked Greg.

"A bazillion?" he questioned.

"You know what I mean. Hanuman's the coolest, man! When Rama's brother-in-law kidnapped Sita, that monkey saved the fucking day! He flew around with an entire forest on his arm!"

"Remember those swimming monkeys in Ubud?" Greg interrupted. Non-sequiturs like this are the norm when one person bears a daily conversational burden that at home is shared by at least a dozen. Beaming, I nodded, breast-stroking furiously in place. Greg, a far more accomplished mimic, upped the ante by climbing a tree, diving into a drinking trough, holding his breath for the underwater crossing, and popping up at the far end, his eyes wild, his wet fur plastered close to his body.

"How about Hanoi?" I giggled. Greg pretended to pedal a miniature bicycle around a circus ring. When his comrades broke ranks, he seized the moment to hurl his bike at his whip-cracking trainer, a valiant rebellion, considering that he was still chained to it by the neck. "Oh my god, I thought I'd die. We were the only ones laughing."

"Or that juvenile who put his foot on me?" Greg recalled, returning to the Monkey Forest. Nibbling an invisible peanut, he planted a companionable bare foot on my upper back. Knowing my cue, I looked around slowly. Startled, Greg snatched his foot back, amazed that he had been so forward with a fully-grown male of the hairless species.

"Or the one who stole the cherries?"

"He was such a thug," Greg remarked admiringly, having imitated both the rubber-faced bandit who helped himself to a heaping armload of fruit from a vendor's cart and the victim, shaking his fists as the thief sat impassively on a telephone wire, spitting the pits onto the man's head. "Where was that? Manali?"

"Dharamsala," I said, wiping my eyes. ★

passing

How an American of Italian, Ukranian,
and Austrian descent ends up passing
for a native of Xin Jiang

words and photos Joyce Orobello

There was a period of time, about a year ago, in which on any given moment on any given day, I was thought to be Kazak, Pakistani, Afghan, Uzbek, Turkish, or any number of Chinese ethnicities. This is amusing because I'm a typical American hybrid, a mixture of Italian, Ukrainian, and Austrian ancestry. When I put a bandana over my brown, curly hair, and slip on my knapsack, I look like any other young American backpacker. To be mistaken for a central Asian Muslim woman is, well, it's among the delicious oddities of traveling.

When I arrived in central China in February of 2002, I was only the seventh foreigner to walk the streets of the small town of Xian Tao, where I was an English teacher at the local high school. My foreign presence was met with blatant curiosity. Both colleagues and passersby would greet me with a confused stare or a warm smile, the way one would look at a baby or a puppy. But more often than not, I was the victim of the "point and shout." Just walking down the street or taking a trip to the vegetable market would put me at the center of hordes of index fingers waving around my face, followed by incomprehensible shouts or name-callings of some sort.

Then I learned what was being said about me. It was one of three words. Either I would be pointed at and called a *lao wai*, a foreigner; a *wai guo ren*, a person from another country; or more commonly, a Xin Jiang *ren*. The latter took me quite some time to figure out, and even longer to accept. As it turned out, Xin Jiang *ren* means a person from Xin Jiang, the largest and northwest most Chinese province.

Well over 90 percent of Chinese people are Han. All of the inhabitants of Xian Tao were Han except for fifteen Xin Jiang *ren*, and three foreign teachers, myself included. As Xian Tao's Xin Jiang people keep to themselves, avoiding confrontation, and worse, assimilation, Xian Tao's Han population had little contact with other people. This cultural

isolation, combined with the fact that I was not their typical image of an American — not tall, fat, blonde, loud, and arrogant — I was then, by default, a Xin Jiang *ren*.

As I started to learn Chinese, I would allow people to continue thinking I was from Xin Jiang. After all, it was pretty interesting to live life as an ethnic Chinese minority. In fact, it was so intriguing a notion that it prompted me to set out on a two-day train ride from my teaching post in central China to the vast land of Xin Jiang, which comprises one-sixth of China's landmass while remaining its most scarcely populated province.

Uttering the words "Xin Jiang," meaning "New Frontier" in Mandarin, to a central or eastern Chinese person usually evokes one of two reactions: either complete awe of the mysterious frontier, or fear of the Uyghur population, the multi-ethnic Muslim peoples with Asian, Middle Eastern, and European physical features I was mistaken for. When arriving in Xin Jiang's capital city of Urumqi, I quickly came to see how this combination of fear and fascination morphed into a web of racism and separatism.

As Xin Jiang's Uyghur population does not want to be assimilated into Han culture, and the Chinese government wants Xin Jiang's rich, natural resources and massive expanse of land, ordinary daily life in Xin Jiang revolves around the Han vs. Minority dichotomy. For example, although China insists its citizens set their clocks and watches to Beijing Time (Beijing is technically two hours ahead of Xin Jiang), the Uyghurs refuse, using their own unofficial time while airplanes, banks and local Hans operate on Beijing time. As you can imagine, this complicates things when setting up appointments and meetings. And although China's official language is Mandarin, the Uyghur schools are instructed in their mother tongue, a Turkish dialect with an Arabic-based script. If Uyghurs and Han Chinese students happen to attend the same university, they are housed in separate dorms,

pictured: a young woman from Xin Jiang Province picking wildflowers on the outskirts of Taxkorgan.

eat in separate dining facilities, and except for extraordinary circumstances, are taught in separate classes. Meanwhile, the Chinese government is providing incentives for Hans to relocate to Xin Jiang, grossly distorting the proportion of Hans to Uyghurs.

I quickly learned all this about Xin Jiang upon my arrival to its capital city of Urumqi in February of 2003. I ended up staying for five months, both teaching and traveling extensively throughout the province. Ironically enough, Xin Jiang, or East Turkistan as it is called by many Uyghurs, with its historical intermingling and then subsequent separation of cultures, was where my American identity veiled itself, and my identity simultaneously became more ambiguous and more transparent.

This had its advantages. Hotel owners who only accepted Chinese guests would not question my nationality, and travel became much, much cheaper. There were transportation perks as well. When traveling out that far in China, near the borders of Pakistan and Afghanistan, the Chinese police heavily patrol the roads leading in or out of the country. To be caught with a foreigner in your car, even if you happen to be a legitimate bus or taxi driver, warrants stiff fines. This makes it nearly impossible for a foreigner to hitchhike, but with my Chinese identity, it was no problem.

Once, while hitchhiking with a Uyghur friend, our car was stopped by the police and we were questioned in Mandarin. The officers, all Han, asked us where we lived and worked and what we were doing. Looking back now, it's hard to believe I told a Chinese Politburo officer, complete with Communist uniform and oversized gun slung around his chest, that I was indeed a Chinese citizen. What's even more remarkable is that he believed me.

Although the Hans automatically mistook me for a Uyghur, the Uyghurs would usually suspect something was awry when I spoke to them in Mandarin. Why would I speak to a fellow Uyghur in the Han tongue? I once went to a Uyghur wedding in a very small village in southern Xin Jiang. It was a scorching hot summer day and a Uyghur friend and I were walking through a village just outside of his hometown. Through the dust, we saw a large pick-up truck head toward us, the back overflowing with giddy Uyghur women dressed in their finest traditional dresses and headscarves. "A wedding!" exclaimed my friend, and we just went with the flow of the crowd, toward the bride's house. As it turned out, my friend knew someone there, which meant that we were officially invited to join in the festivities.

Uyghur houses are a series of connecting rooms arranged in a hollowed-out square shape, with a giant courtyard in the middle. The men danced, sung, and played music outside while the women did the same inside. My friend stayed outside, while I shyly went into the house and was surprised to be welcomed by the mother

of the bride. I was even more surprised when she asked if I was Han. Certainly, I didn't look Han, but why else would I use that language to talk with her? I did not want to reveal my identity, fearing it would result in an abundance of attention. However, as Hans rarely go to such poor Uyghur villages, I was welcomed as a special guest, nonetheless. This was the only time I saw Uyghurs and Hans genuinely enjoying one another, even though I wasn't

genuinely Han. It was quite a change from the arguments I heard over the seating arrangements on a public bus a few days before, as the Hans and Uyghurs refused to sit next to one another. In a way, I began to feel that ethnicity was not important. What's the difference if I were Han as opposed to Uyghur or American? As a traveler, I was able to transcend this aspect of identity because I was not subject to the regulations imposed by culture; but I was open to — and inspired by — them.

While in Taxkorgan, a small town in the south of Xin Jiang, close to Tajikistan, I was never even asked where I was from, as people just assumed I was either Uyghur, Tajik or a Chinese-Tajik because they were so accustomed to seeing foreigners arrive with tour groups as opposed to with Uyghur friends. For the first time in years, I would have dinner in people's homes and they would not treat me like some sort of foreign creature. I felt partially as though I was deceiving them, and partially as though I was sharing a secret with myself as I took on the roles of all these different ethnicities. It allowed me to eat rice with my hand and share nan bread with people who would normally just stare instead of talking to me.

On my last day in Taxkorgan, I was invited to pick flowers by a little Tajik girl whose family had emigrated from Tajikistan to China two generations before. She believed I was from her homeland, but I blew my cover when I revealed a Nikon single lens reflex camera. She was stunned and ran inside to her home and came out donning a beaded hat with a yellow veil. Most of the Tajik women in Taxkorgan wore such hat/veil combinations, but hers was more intricately woven, and I immediately knew it was for special occasions only. The girl told me her mother wore it on her wedding day and that when she was old enough she too will hand-make her own wedding veil. Although she clearly wanted me

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to take her picture with the headpiece, she could only stare back at me reluctantly when I asked her to smile. As it turned out, it was the first time she was photographed.

As an avid traveler, I must admit to being attracted to

the absurd happenings that can only occur when being displaced from one's usual surroundings. That, for me, is the most fascinating part of traveling. It is only apt that Xin Jiang, as the historical East-meets-West crossroads and the setting of China's famous magical folktale of the Monkey King's Journey to the West, along with its own cultural crises, became more than just a backdrop for a new place to tour. It actually became such a part of my identity. After just a brief amount of time there, I felt as though I too had undergone some sort of identity exploration and cultural metamorphosis.

When I think back to my time in Xin Jiang, I remember the severe dichotomies: the blizzard I arrived in, followed by the unquenchable desert thirst that five months later left my throat and body dry; the high mountain ranges separating the region from its Muslim neighbors, and the low Turpan basin, open to the world and to the elements; the smoggy air and little red taxis of the capital city, Urumqi, and the donkey carts and hand-pumped water of the smaller villages; and of course the ethnic divide of Han and Uyghur, all of which had tugged at my American traveler's façade.

As a traveler, life can sometimes appear unreal. Cultures and people and food and daily happenings exist not in reality, but rather as a sort of display for the hedonistic voyeur. To step outside of my *wai guo ren*, or outsider's skin, was more like a travel of the spirit than of the usual sort. And so I realized, upon leaving Xin Jiang, on my way to the airport along a dusty, dirt road that wove through the cities and towns and cut through the mountains rather haphazardly, that I too was just cutting through, as if without reason, leaving behind by own dusty path of unfinished identities. ☆



Moments ⁱⁿ Block and White Race through the Philippines

After a long day on a motorcycle, rolling around the island of Bohol in the Philippines (one of its some 7,000 islands), we met some friends for drinks at the Flying Fish Bar on Alona Beach, where we were promised the best band of the area was playing that night. I sat at the bar and ordered a planter's punch.

The bartender made a face and walked out the door. Returning five minutes later, a whole pineapple in hand, he brandished a giant meat cleaver and cut the pineapple into quarters. He then proceeded to pulp the fruit and drain the juice into my glass, with an equal measure of vodka and a bit of cherry brandy to top it off. From his pocket, he produced a small ripe mango, and brandishing the cleaver again, cut a sliver of fruit out. Spearing the slice with an American flag toothpick, he slid the drink down the bar towards me.

Heat flushed my cheeks. The amount of effort that went into this 75 cent drink, combined with a symbol I cringed at, made me queasy. Having lived through a tumultuous year in Asia, I had grown accustomed to saying I was from Canada when asked. Vancouver, actually.

Now some would "tsk tsk" me, but my reasons went beyond state department recommendations that travel to the Philippines was extremely risky and that the threat of terrorist attack against Americans was high. It went beyond the fact that the terrorist group Abu Sayyaf was well known for kidnapping Americans and holding them for exorbitant ransom. It went beyond the recent bombings in the region where I was currently traveling.

More and more, America was feeling like an alien land. I was continually embarrassed by the demanding, insulting, and insensitive behavior of Americans I had encountered abroad. I did not want to be associated with my government's policies in Asia. And I was concerned about domestic issues too — thousands of people held without bail, etc. In short, it did not feel much like my country, "the great beacon of democracy," and I didn't want to be associated with it, particularly here.

Jo Jo, my Filipino friend, looked at my drink. "Don't you have one of our flags back there?" he called to the bartender, who glanced over, then took a swig of his San Miguel and lit a cigarette.

This same companion, and his friend James, took several opportunities to point out how "black" they were compared to us. They worked in the sun, he said. No good. My Tasmanian friend who I was traveling with, remarked to me later how in rural China it's the same way: no one wants to be dark. It means that you are a farmer. And you are poor.

We'd rented our motorcycles earlier that day. Off for a romp around the island, we got 25 km down the road and realized we were getting extremely sunburned. Stopping in a village, we enquired after some sunscreen. Twenty or so people crowded around us — two tall white women on motorcycles. What were we doing in Bohol? Where were our men? Cream for skin? Not to burn? No, no, they said. Only in the big city. Back again to the dusty, colorful streets of Tagbilaran, dodging *jeepneys* and *tuk tuks*, we entered the cacophony of the supermarket, the

big-
gest
store on Bo-
hol. They pointed
us to the whitener
aisle.

words and photos Danee Voorhees

"The whitener aisle?" I asked.

And there it was: an entire aisle, shelf after shelf, of skin bleaching and whitening products in different strengths, sizes, brands, and packaging. It was more discombobulating than a trip to the shampoo section of an American supermarket.

According to the Asian cosmetic company FANCL, their product White Essence "works on each stage of the process that melanin is produced in order to fortify its restraining power on 'excessive' melanin production. In addition, its reduction power has been significantly increased so that once darkened melanin is smoothly faded and your skin develops a translucent glow." Some skin whitening creams are extremely dangerous, as they contain toxic chemicals designed to literally bleach the skin. But the risks don't stop everyone: according to Peggy Cheng, an international trainer for Clarins International, skin whitening products account for 60 percent of all beauty product sales in greater Asia.

In the end, we came out with a bottle of Block and White, designed to whiten our skin as it blocked out the sun rays (20 SPF.) It was the only sunscreen in the whole market.

This conversation about color repeated itself in different settings many times during my stay in the Philippines. "Black," as my Filipino companion would refer to himself, is bad, ugly; white is good. In my later travels, I would also have this conversation in Myanmar, Thailand, and Nepal. But this self-hate is not unique to East and Southeast Asia: it exists as well in India, Africa, and within communities of color in the United States, where women use whitening products. How does one come to adopt such ideas? There are a few versions of the story: internalized racism and the desire to emulate the rich.

The Philippines has struggled under over 400 years of colonialism. The explorer, Ferdinand Magellan, landed in Cebu in 1521 and declared the land for Spain. They gained their independence from Spain in 1898, when with American help, Spain was ousted from the Philippines. With great dreams of independence, freedom fighters drew up the first demo-

cratic constitution in Asia. This dream was dashed when, at the end of the Spanish-American war, the Philippines was ceded to the United States.

Though the Philippines gained independence from the US in 1946, US influence in the region remained strong, particularly until the end of Ferdinand Marcos' regime in 1986. Today, the US provides military aid (the last batch of money was termed "development aid" and consisted of gifts of helicopters, medical equipment for the military, satellite technology, defense "goods and services," and money to develop a "combat engineering unit" to better fight the war on terrorism). The US government has also placed a \$5 million dollar bounty on the heads of the Abu Sayyaf terrorist group. Moreover, the Philippines has seen the second biggest deployment of troops in Asia since Afghanistan.

In addition to military presence, the cultural influence of the United States remains strong in the Philippines, particularly in the realm of music. My night at the Flying Fish Bar, a band performed hits from Blink 182, Madonna, the Red Hot Chili Peppers, the Eagles, the Doors, and Limp Bizkit. American magazines are popular, and billboards feature gorgeous white women selling products to Asian audiences. Pico Iyer notes that, "the most conspicuous institutions that America had bequeathed to the Philippines seemed to be the disco, the variety show, and the beauty pageant." In other words, US colonization has been largely cultural in form.

Again and again, the western beauty myth seems to set the standard by which to judge beauty in the Philippines. As Linda Acupanda McLooin

forged over centuries of foreign rule, the task of defining one's identity became even more complicated."

And then there is the desire to emulate the rich. The former beauty queen and wife of the dictator, Imelda Marcos, once proclaimed herself "the symbol of beauty for her people."


So it goes. Rich people stay indoors. Poor people work in the sun and hence, get darker. Rich people eat better, have better health care, etc. and thus look healthier than the poor. Since people everywhere desire symbols of status and seek to emulate the rich, perhaps this argument is not so far off. My bottle of Block and White said on the back "wear during long hours of fieldwork," suggesting that people concerned with their color must work outdoors.

The wealth gap in the Philippines is astronomical. Imelda Marcos, when forced to flee the royal palace in 1986, left behind as many as 3,000 pairs of shoes (though other reports claim she only had 1,220 pairs) When she paid a visit abroad in the 80's, she proclaimed, "in the Philippines, we live in a Paradise. There are no poor people like there are in other countries," at a time when 7 out of 10 Filipinos were living below the poverty line. Indeed, the Marcos regime hoarded much of the country's wealth for itself — with Imelda and Ferdinand building summer residences and palaces all over the world. Imelda's jewelry collection is said to rival her shoe collection. Today, an estimated 40-60% of the population lives below the poverty line, and the cities are dusty, shack-ridden hells that have the menacing vibes and seediness of a Mexican border town.

writes, "What is a Filipina? Is she Asian or Western?" Meanwhile, another popular procedure among the well to do in the Philippines (and among other Asian women) involves plastic surgery to create the western crease in the upper eyelids.

There is much to be said on the ways that colonialism alters the structure of society in a colonized culture. Both the Spanish and the United States introduced their own forms of subjugation and concepts of rank into the country. The Spanish, for example, introduced Catholicism into the Philippines, whose version of creation (woman came from man's rib) starkly contrasts the traditional creation story of the Philippines, in which a piece of bamboo was pecked open by a bird to reveal the first man and woman, who rose together out of the bamboo shoot. Ninety-four percent of the population now claims to be Christian, and women's status has decreased.

Colonialism creates conflicting self-images and makes the formation of a national identity difficult. As it is difficult for people organizing against the dominant culture to not recreate structures of power and dominance within their own groups, because this is the culture they know, it is difficult for newly independent countries to reform into more equitable societies that do not recreate the racial/gender biases they have been subjected to. These systems of inequality become internalized to the point that it exceeds consciousness. It becomes "just the way it is." As Linda Acupanda McLooin notes, "this is not to say that the pre-colonial Philippines was free of sexual exploitation — but when those [foreign] values were grafted onto the colonial social, economic, and political institutions



So it goes. Rich people stay indoors ... My bottle of Block and White said on the back "wear during long hours of fieldwork," suggesting that people concerned with their color must work outdoors

Poverty is such that the country's biggest export is workers, and the most educated get out. Filipinas who are trained lawyers, accountants, and teachers go to Hong Kong, for example, as domestic workers (maids). The government set wage is

\$350 a month plus room and board, for six days a week, 12+ hours per day. This is often more money than they can make working in their professions at home. Many leave their children at home to take care of other people's children for this wage, in a city where the cost of living is higher than New York's.

Everyone wants money. And whether that means desiring what the rich have within the country, or the Westerners who come through on vacation, this is how it is.

Unfortunately, the globalization of media means we continue to ship our culture (and the racism and biases that exist within it) around the globe. Only by building sustainable, localized media institutions within these countries and the formation of stronger national identity can the Philippines hope to overcome some of these ideas of whiteness.

And, as travelers in the region, we have the responsibility to work to not propagate ideas of whiteness as power. This means traveling humbly, eating and sleeping as the locals do, and not showing off fancy toys like digital cameras and MP3 players. It means leaving your money belts, passport carriers (worn under the shirt, of course), distrust, and concepts of "customer service" at home. It means you must also leave as much of your culture at home as possible. The Philippines has enough of it as it is. ☆



Oregon's North Portland Bikeworks embodies the best of the Do-It-Yourself ethic: hard work, resourcefulness, and the possibility of shaping your own life in ways consistent with your beliefs. They are truly a community asset as seen in their open atmosphere, the variety of programs they offer, and the money-less options available. After volunteering there for a couple of months I wanted to find out more about the history, underlying premises and operations of the group, as well as to celebrate what they have done to serve as an inspiration to others. I sat down with co-conspirators Kim Fern and Alex McFarland to talk about the project.

Clamor: How did North Portland Bikeworks come about?

Alex: Well, in the winter of 2001 maybe ten local North Portland bikers, bike activists and mechanics got together. We saw a need for a shop in North Portland, a community shop where everyone would feel comfortable going to and learning bike stuff.

How long from it's inception as an idea did it take to become an actuality?

Alex: We started, I believe, around November of 2001, and the shop opened in July.

Four Wheels Bad.



Kim: We did eight months of intensive strategic development and planning, lots of fundraisers and structural work in terms of who we are. Not only just organizationally, like if we were a collective, or we had a hierarchical structure, but also a lot of how we wanted the shop to actually function...the programs we wanted to develop and the services we wanted to offer.

How did you arrive at this particular spot?

Alex: We all live in the neighborhood and we saw the (for rent) sign outside. We walked down to it, checked it out, made an appointment to come look at it and thought it was a great neighborhood for us to be a part of. Since we live here it just made good sense.

Kim: We wanted to make sure that we were in a space not only that we lived around, but one that had an atmosphere of a main, central heart of a community, so-to-speak. This kind of fit the bill. There are very few places in North Portland that are for rent that would be suitable to us, and this happened to kind of just fit all of our needs. (laughter)

Alex: Or most, except for heat and ceilings and bathrooms, electricity and dry floors

Two Wheels Good.

interview and photos J Powers

continued next page

Kim: We got the space in early July and worked our butts off cleaning it and painting it and building a lot of our structure. We didn't even have a storefront when we opened, just a big plywood front with a particle board door.

Alex: No windows either. We got windows about three months ago maybe.

Kim: So a lot of people didn't even know we were here. But, being young and resourceful, and a lot of us coming from punk rock backgrounds, we made it happen.

Alex: Yeah, DIY

Kim: How about DIY 'til death?

(laughter)

It does have a very DIY atmosphere here. I think it shows what can be accomplished with little resources.

Kim: I think it comes out of our commitment and the diversity of people who are working in this shop. Me and Alex, for example, are tremendously different people, but we complement. It's the same with Bob, who's another woman that's involved, and Mariana and a few others. We definitely bring very different things and are all part of very different communities. [The shop] is just very reflective of who we are as individuals, very open and welcoming.

Alex: It was very important to us to not be cliquey. That was a huge priority for all of us.

Kim: All of our programs stemmed out of that, so we do offer services and programs that I think accommodate a wide array of people.

Since we're on that

women's night, from 6-8 every Wednesday. Women can show up in an open, friendly environment and work on their bike. And it's trans-friendly. And it's free.

Kim: And we have mechanics classes every Thursday.

Alex: Every Thursday it's a different subject, about an hour and a half for each class. There's a community bike night, which is the third Tuesday of every month. That's a free night so anyone can show up and work on their own bike for free and get some help with it too.



Kim: We also have work trade, pretty much on a case-by-case basis. People can come in and work a number of hours, depending on what they need done. For example, if you needed a chain, if we had a used chain that we were able to reuse, it's about an hour's worth of your work time to earn that chain. Some people do work trade for classes.

Alex: We also have facility use as kind of a "program" of ours, renting the facility outright for people to work on their own bike, or trading use of the facilities for volunteer hours.

Who are the main people that are involved, what are their backgrounds, and what else do they do?

Alex: Well, all of the members of the board right now are Jenny, Zan, Bob, and Mariana. Bob and Mariana were with it from the beginning, since last winter. Then there are the two co-directors, which are Kim and I.

Kim: A lot of the board members either are bike mechanics, bike commuters and/or bike

Kim: Yeah, it's definitely not the most high-tech of all bike shops, and that's what's so endearing about it in my eyes. Everything here (gesturing to the shelves and tool racks) is made by hand and you can definitely tell. We don't have high-end anything really. I mean there are only a few things in the shop that are expensive, aside from tools.

That ties into something else that I was going to comment on. It's a really welcoming environment here. I know that with a lot of projects that are more DIY-based a wide variety of people don't necessarily feel welcome because there's this image, no matter how true or untrue it is, of a scene, and certain people may feel excluded. But this place doesn't feel that way to me.

subject could you go over each of your programs?

Alex: First we have the earn-a-bike program for youth and adult. The youth program is for kids 10-17 and it involves about 15 hours of volunteer work. After they've completed their 15 hours they get a bicycle and a helmet. It's a basic one-speed bike. During their volunteering they learn about bikes. They learn about how to do basic stuff like patching and wheel removal, and they help with the functioning of the shop, helping organize and sweep. We have an adult earn-a-bike program which we have no funding for right now, so we have a waiting list. We take one person at a time and have them complete a number of volunteer hours, roughly 30, and that would get them a basic bicycle. Another program is

advocates. One of our board members works for the Bicycle Transportation Alliance, another at Citybikes, which is a coop in Portland, another is a bike commuter who works at the Sexual Minority Youth Recreation Center. I have worked in nonprofits for over six years now, doing a lot of grantwriting and development work.

Alex: I worked at the Community Cycling Center, that was my previous job, since '98. We got to do a few bike clubs with youth where we would go out to the schools and let them earn bikes. So I have a background working as a mechanic and with youth.

You mentioned before that one of the priorities when starting this place was a women's night. That impresses me because any kind of mechanical anything is generally male-biased. More males are into it, more males are encouraged to be into it, more males are validated in pursuing it. So I think it is great that you all are addressing the gender bias in mechanics.

Kim: Yeah, I think it's pretty rare that, not

The DIY ethic, in my mind anyway, is inherently political.

Kim: Absolutely. Something we haven't really addressed is our stock of used stuff and recycling materials which I always feel like is a huge component of who we are. For only six months old we have a pretty large selection of used stuff.

Do you feel that North Portland Bikeworks connects with the neighborhood and contributes to community in the area on the level that you all wanted it to in its inception? I'm asking this because of the ongoing issues in North Portland around gentrification. How do you see the organization in regards to these issues?

Alex: We were very aware and wanted to be very cautious in all of our actions in North

bike fixed to give them an option. And by not having a certain attitude....like, if we had a bunch of high-end stuff and really expensive bikes then I would say that's definitely not helping. But that's not us.

So the motivation for doing this is not capitalist, which of course makes it harder to sustain. How are you sustaining?

Alex: The shop and our programs are sustaining us. We kind of squeeze by, sometimes breaking even with our shop business and our programs, like the earn-a-bike program. We got one small grant for that, and it allows one staff person to be with the earn-a-bike candidates.

Kim: We also do a ton of fundraisers. We have at least one or two a month, which for most nonprofits is unheard of. They usually



Portland because of this displacement and gentrification. It was very important for us to be careful with these things. I think that by offering low-cost repairs we make our services available to everyone, and by offering work trade

our services are available to everyone. And, given the nature of the shop that we are, we aim to be welcoming to everyone regardless of background. So we've tried to kind of be proactive, or just pay good attention to these things.

Kim: So much of it isn't in our immediate hands. We don't own the property...

Alex: Right, we can just do what we can, which is if someone can't afford to get their

have one or two a year that they dedicate a large amount of time to. We have had everything from a Black Panther documentary film, to the Halloween cover band show, to local punk bands and emoish bands playing, as well as our neighbor's gospel band.

And that's been really successful?

Kim: It takes a lot of energy for Alex and I to do that, but it's been successful. I'm very proud of a lot of people in our larger....not only in our small punk and anarcho- or eco- community, but the larger community of Portland donating, whether it be parts or even an extra couple of bucks here and there, being like "Oh, here, the show is four dollars? Here's an extra dollar." This has happened a ton of times.

only do we have two co-directors, one who's a woman and one who's a man, but our entire board of directors are women, which is pretty insanely rare, in terms of the nonprofit and business worlds as a whole. I think that because of that, the underlying theme of who we are as an organization, that the programs we offer, and probably will offer in the future, will definitely be such that they are directly addressing certain things. It's not directly said in the shop, but I think a lot of who we are is politically motivated.

And money from bike donations.

Alex: Yeah. Fixing up old bikes. Lately we haven't been selling very many bikes, it's been mostly repairs and parts and stuff. They're the bread and butter of the shop.

You get a lot of bike donations?

Alex: It comes in waves. All of the full bikes that we have, and all of the used parts that we have, which is actually a tremendous amount, has all been donated to us. The word is getting out and people are bringing us their old bikes and bike parts.

Kim: We actually got three donations yesterday, separate donations, everything from a bike, panniers, which are bags that hang on your bike, and tons of bike parts. It is pretty phenomenal. I get continually amazed by people.

So how is the organization itself structured? Is it a collective?

Alex: We have the regular nonprofit structure, but our big decisions are on a consensus basis.

deny you they could ask for changes, but ultimately, they could just deny you. So I was really scared, because pretty much the only fundraising we had was about \$500.

It was probably the hardest I've ever worked on anything in my whole life. You have to cross-reference throughout your whole application and you have to project a budget for three years. You have to write about what you're going to be offering, and who your board of directors are. There's all these components of it that all relate back to one another, so if I change something one day I have to remember that it's cross-referenced in this other section. By the time I was done, I was going to give it to Bob so she could mail it, and she was trying to grab it out of my hand. It was like in a movie, I couldn't let go of it. She was like "It's ok, I promise you I'll mail it" and I'm like "(whimpering)." She mailed it and it only took about a month for us to get nonprofit status. So it's a pretty lengthy thing, but if I can do it, anybody can do it. It was a lot of work ... many hours. But

who I think is one of the most phenomenal people I've ever met in my life, but working with our volunteers and all of the board members. And just learning every day about something that I didn't know, not only about bicycle repair, but also about neighborhood residents, something about "Oh yeah, down the street used to be blah blah," or somebody asking advice and being like "Well actually you don't need to spend \$500 on a new bike. Used bikes are just as good." Just being honest and not having to bullshit to make money. That's very different than what our society tells us we have to do. I think that's a continual theme that runs through who we are.

I think it's a good testament to the fact that with people that are committed you can really accomplish something that might seem



Would you talk about your process of getting nonprofit status?

Kim: Oregon is amazing in that we have a nonprofit organization here called TACS, Technical Assistance for Community Services. They are a warehouse of information for nonprofits. You can go there and attend their seminars and workshops that are based on developing a nonprofit, how to write a grant, how to do strategic planning, all of these different angles. They put together the Oregon Nonprofit Handbook, and it was pretty much my Bible in starting up this organization. I wasn't a bike mechanic when we opened the shop, but I had these skills of working in nonprofits, and we had this really amazing resource that I was able to read.

I got the IRS application. It probably took about a month to do it. It's a \$500 fee to apply if you're going to have a net income of more than \$25,000, which I knew we would. And you won't get that \$500 back. If they

it was worth it. Now we can write grants under our name.

Is there anything else that you want to add? Anything that I'm missing?

Kim: One of the main things to me that's important is this shop sets an example. None of us are over 30 years old. I'm the oldest one and I'm twenty nine. I believe in creating change, creating a place that I want to live in and making that happen. It's such an important thing that this bike shop exists because we did it ourselves. That's such an inherent part of who I am and who, I think, we are as a whole, whether we actively say it or not. You always can have control over your life and over how you want things to develop if you put your heart and soul into it.

This totally came out of my gut belief that we don't have to work for anybody. We can create this thing. And we have. I'm continually amazed, not only working with Alex,

so out of your reach in many ways. Coming to work every day, sometimes I forget that this is the biggest inspiration in my life, not only in working with the people I work with, but being able to do what I do. I have probably what will be the most amazing job of my life, and I've had some really great jobs. Now I'm 100% behind what I do every single minute of the day. I've never been able to say that before.

Alex: Yeah, it's quite a feeling to have a job that you feel completely sincere about and you don't have to worry about what you say in front of your boss....

Because you don't have a boss.

Alex: Right. It feels great to be behind it completely, what I do for a living. I just hope it continues for as long as it can. ★

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Clamor celebrates the 20th anniversary of the film that changed graffiti and hip hop cultures forever

Just at the moment when hip hop was exploding from a neighborhood passion to a popular phenomenon, Henry Chalfant and Tony Silver caught it on camera in their now-classic 1983 film, *Style Wars*. Following graffiti writers from the trainyards of the Bronx to the galleries of Soho, the documentary now stands as a tribute to the pioneers of one of the most powerful cultural forces in the world today. To celebrate the 20th anniversary of the movie, Plexifilm released a DVD version and gathered some of the movie's original participants, including Kay Slay and Frosty Freeze, to talk about what MCing, DJing, breaking, and graffiti were like in the 80s, how those things have changed, and the role the movie played in that transition.

Interview Gregory Keller
photos Nadia Hallgreen



left: Style Wars cover photo © Martha Cooper. right: Kay Slay photo by Henry Chalfant

Clamor: A lot of people say that Style Wars blew up the culture and helped hip hop to go worldwide. Why do you think so many people took to it and still want to do it today?

Kay Slay: Yo, Style Wars is the epitome of every ghetto. It was like everything that was goin' on, and it was real. A lot of the joints that came out — "Beat Street" was like a story, like "Rambo!" and that wasn't real. This was real. This was a real beef we had with Cap, they was really breakdancing against Dynamic Rockers, we was really on the subway tracks. It wasn't nothin' fabricated. Mayor Koch was really an asshole.

[Laughter]

Frosty Freeze: True

Tony Silver: And a comedian.

Kay Slay: It was real.

Tony Silver: They were real life characters. Real people who were living an incredible drama. An amazing real life theatrical experience. It had been building for 12 years essentially, since 1970, which was when a couple of things started. It was when Kool Herc came out and Taki 183 all by himself went all city and developed that whole concept. And by the time we were filming, came the danger that it was gonna be over for many reasons. There was that peak intensity. And it had moved from uptown and the boroughs, it was concentrating downtown, and so in a hundred ways all that energy was flowing all through the city, in the veins of the city. If Dez [Kay-Slay] did a piece in the morning it was all over the city by the afternoon and someone was looking at it, and saying, you know, "I could burn it."

You mentioned the culture being 12 years in the making by the time you came in. It's been said that couldn't happen today. Any youth

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You mentioned the culture being 12 years in the making by the time you came in. It's been said that couldn't happen today. Any youth movement would be capitalized on by a corporation and immediately sold back to the public before it had a chance to evolve.

Tony Silver: Couldn't happen in New York. And in that sense it was more segregated when it started. I mean nobody knew about B-Boys in the mid-'70s when it was really happening in a major way for the first time, and a lot of those forms and styles were being formed then.

Henry Chalfant: Nobody downtown knew, nobody from our part of the city was aware of it. I was hanging out with you guys for a long time before anybody ever brought it up. Nobody ever said anything about B-Boys.

Kay Slay: When Rock Steady came out, y'all was like the third generation of break dancers.

Frosty Freeze: Second.

Kay Slay: What year y'all came out?

Frosty Freeze: Well um —

Kay Slay: 'Cause first you had the Herculoids.



Frosty Freeze



Quik

Frosty Freeze: Right.

Kay Slay: Zulu Nation, Little Rudy and The Nine Crew.

Frosty Freeze: Casanova, Zulu Kings.

Kay Slay: But then after that you had the Floormasters, the Floormaster Tops, the Smokeatrons, Wayne O and the Executioners —

Henry Chalfant: — PDB, Rock Boys.

Kay Slay: After that what happened? I know in our hood it

got to the point where they used to go "Aw man, stop cleanin' up the floor." Remember that, spinnin' on ya head you're gettin' brain damage. That's when we was like "Whoa," once you break dancing and a chick walk by like "Oh he cleanin' up the floor."

Henry Chalfant: That was the end of that.

Kay Slay: That was the terminology that made us and that's when y'all [Rock Steady] got strong into it, and y'all started goin' to another level with it. That's what made people latch on to the different elements of hip hop, 'cause as soon as it goes down it would be one group to come, or two, and people start makin' money off of it. At first nobody was makin' no money off of it.

Tony Silver: Also they weren't really showing it to anyone else, they were just showing it to each other.

Henry Chalfant: It was entirely between kids.

Kay Slay: You had to go where it was at. After a while you go to 42nd, guys have radios out there, but before that if you ain't goin' to a jam, if you wasn't in Bronx River, Clinton Center, PAL, or you wasn't in the hood, in the project, or in the park, and they was break dancin', you wasn't gonna see it. It was like something hidden.

Tony Silver: I remember one night, it must've been '81, '82, we were at the Roxy, you and I, and Frosty was there, Legs was there, it was one o'clock in the morning, and two guys walked in who were older and they went up to, I think Legs, and said hello. And they were clearly older, and somebody challenged them to see if they could still do it, because somebody made some kind of remark about Legs not doin' it right, "the way we did it" or something like that. And they got down, and you could see right away that it was an older school, it had its own style, its own elegance, and it belonged to the same thing. But it was an older school, it was just a moment. It was amazing.

Kay Slay: They had cats like, they had this kid Swang, He used to be terrible. Then they had this kid E-Man that was down with the Floormasters, he had moves.

Floormasters was the best crew in Manhattan, like Harlem. You had E-Man, he'd do the inchworm, smokin' a joint. Then you had this kid called Ice-Man who'd freeze his whole body but his leg would be shakin' like — [KS shakes leg]. Then you had Ray Von and Diamond Dave. Diamond Dave was the kid who'd do the Chico, you know how they'd do the Spanish move. They had a team. Then they had Spivey —

Frosty Freeze: Spivey

Kay Slay: With the flips—

Frosty Freeze: With the flips.

Kay Slay: Okay. They had a team where whoever you put out they had somebody boom, get 'em. And they used to go to Schoenberg on 110th Street, they used to be like "Yo the Floormasters is breakin'." People would come from everywhere in the hood.

Tony Silver: This is like '78? '79?

Kay Slay: This is like '78, '79, I was goin' to Junior High School 13.

Frosty Freeze: All that stuff he's sayin' was original, you don't usually see that stuff today, except like I can still do most of the original

moves and I keep that vibe goin' so, like, heads know. And like the only other person besides myself is Wayne from the Executioners and Greggo and them that keep their street mentality B-Boy style goin'. Legs and them, Ken Swift and 'em took it to the next level where they added backspins and headspins. Rock Steady, I don't speak about those guys from the first generation but like from the Bronx and Manhattan, that was the original B-Boy. It was mostly blacks, it wasn't too many Latinos until the '80s because in our view it was played out.

Kay Slay: What he's sayin is true, 'cause what it was like was, say we broke-danced but we couldn't fuck with them when it came to the Hustle. Like back when we was break dancin' they had the fuckin' like, like when John Travolta was doin' that Hustle shit, we couldn't fuck with them, like they had their own dance.

Henry Chalfant: But I've been talking to people who were with the Bronx Boys and Starchild La Rock and Rockwell, and these Bronx crews were affiliated with Rock Steady and they're a little older than you. And they were telling me how they see it, most of them Latino kids. It was like Zulu Nation Foundation was when all the black kids were doing it, and they took it and gave it a Boricua flavor, and they

kind of took over after, as you say, people in your neighborhood started to say I don't wanna get my clothes dirty.

Kay Slay: You're cleanin' the floor, yeah —

Henry Chalfant: So then they continued, and that's why you all were still doing it by 1981 when—

Tony Silver: And what about the Queens crews, what about the Dynamic Rockers, how did it get there?



Frosty Freeze: Ok, see, the two guys, Kid Glide and Mr. Freeze, that's George and Victor, were from Manhattan and those are like my rivals like goin' into the '80s. 'Cause it was lie, for them goin' up against me, they were no match, they wasn't in my category. But tempers begin to flare when you humiliate somebody else and they can't take it. They got played out as far as me takin' 'em out. This is before I even met

Legs and 'em. What happened was they weren't happenin' and they started goin' to clubs outside of Manhattan and the Bronx to Queens. And they figured they got a bunch of guys like Kid Freeze and Wavy Legs. And those guys that got into it slowly but surely, but the way they learned was by watching us. We used the terminology "biting." They didn't do it the original way like me and Crazy Legs and Ken Swift. 'Cause we went to hip hop parties and the whole foundation we learned from watching Kool Herc and the Herculoids, the Zulu Kings, guys on the East Side, the Executioners, Floormasters. I was on a crew on the West Side called The Rock City Crew who came from Sun Dance. Sun Dance was able to go up to the Bronx. And Queens had their little thing. I give Dynamic respect, even then and now; they put Queens on the map, but yet they weren't original B-Boys. Like we would constantly battle, from *Style Wars*, which was real, to the Lincoln Center battle. We were rivals. We were straight up enemies, hated, but just from a distance point. We wasn't gang rivals or nothing like that, we was just B-Boy rivals.

Kay Slay: Back then it was funny, you had to have your shirt, your name was on your shirt, you had the iron-on letters poppin', you had the shiny glitter letters poppin', your Lee's, your Adidas, your Pumas, and you went to Blocks and you battled. I remember the first time I seen someone spinnin' on they head. This kid named JJ, and he had like a — rest in peace he's deceased — his head was about this long — [measuring out two feet]

Kay Slay: — and I remember, nobody could spin on their head longer, like he'd spin on his head, then like when he finished, he didn't go down, like he'd still be standin' on his head. Like you ever seen someone do that, like they could keep twistin' and let their hand go and then stop again. I was like "Yo, he got a strong neck." Like how could you stay on top of your head like that?

On the DVD, Doze talks about hip hop becoming political in other countries, such as Brazil, in a way it never was here. Do you agree with that and what do you think that means?

Henry Chalfant: I think what he means about Brazil is there was a kind of Black Nationalist thing that people were doing, there was a community cohesion, and that hip hop was a part of it there.

Tony Silver: We've been hearing about this.

Henry Chalfant: We know it's not particularly political here. It's not political at all.

Tony Silver: There were always people who wanted to, on the fringe or wherever, who were trying to mobilize the idea that it is political, or that was a subtext of it all along. I don't think it really was, particularly. It was more about people who were 15, or 16, or 19 years old, basically discovering a way of expressing themselves and looking at each other doing it and competing and battling.

There aren't a lot of rappers who can get away with being political because it seems put on, KRS-One is one—

Kay Slay: Chuck D
Right, Public Enemy.

Frosty Freeze: See those are the last poets in the '80s. In the '90s it just became more industry takin' over, watered down, commercializin'. It's about makin' money, and how well your records sell, how well you do on tour, the publicity comes along with it, and how well your

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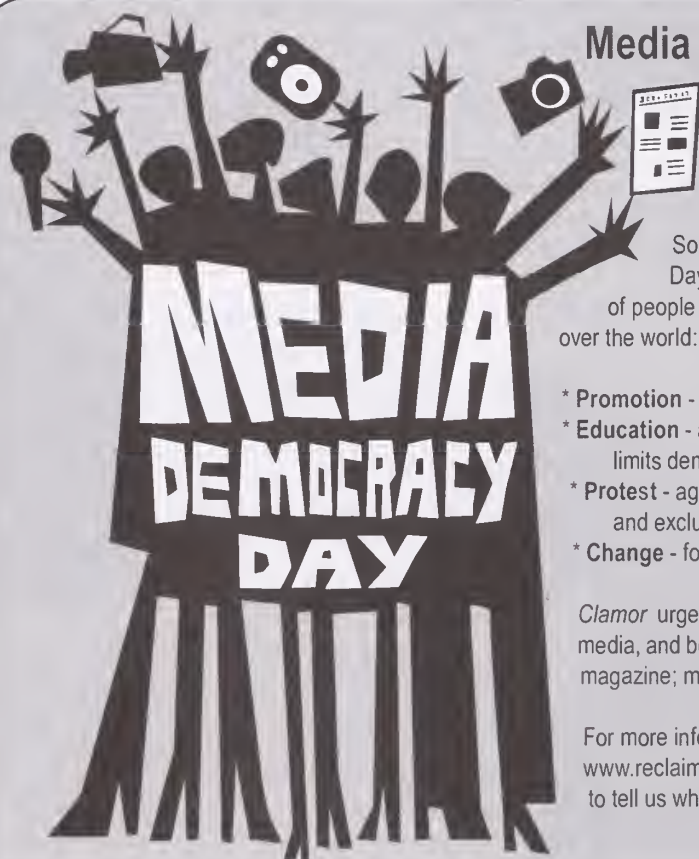
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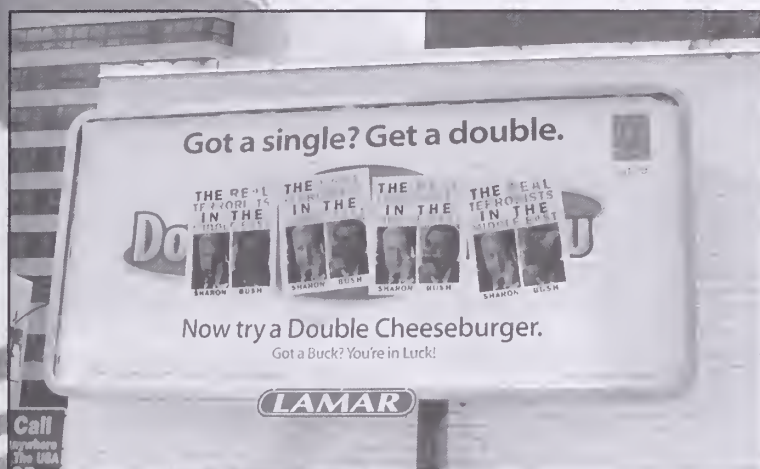
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Our Streets, Our Galleries



Josh MacPhee is a Chicago-based artist/activist involved in a number of varied projects and practices. For the past decade, Chicago he has been reaching audiences through many forms of street art, including spraypaint stencils and wheatpasted posters. MacPhee is also a self-appointed documentarian of all forms of public expression by others, from traditional graffiti to altered stop signs to marker scrawls on corporate advertisements. With this documentation he has put together small and inexpensive artist books/zines and is currently working on a book about spraypaint stencils called *Stencil Pirates* that will be published in March 2004 on Soft Skull Press. MacPhee also runs a graphic arts project called *justseeds* to develop and distribute t-shirts, posters and other agit-prop, such as the *Celebrate People's History Poster Series*, a collection of 2-color offset posters by many artists celebrating people and events in history that are rarely taught in schools. In addition to more traditional graphic work, MacPhee also helps organize tactic media actions, and radical cultural activities in artist collectives or ad-hoc artist groups. These have included weekends of public cultural action called the *Department of Space and Land Reclamation* and the *Autonomous Territories of Chicago* as well as working with the artist collective *Street.Rec*. Josh MacPhee was interviewed by Nicolas Lampert, organizer of Drawing Resistance, in a two part session via email in April, 2003.

Clamor: Much of your artwork — stencils, wheat pasting is displayed on the streets, for all to see. To generalize, the majority of artists choose to display their work in the confines of an art gallery. What are your feelings about showing political art in these types of spaces, both established and underground?

Josh MacPhee: Unfortunately, I think many artists don't really think much about the context of their work. A lot of "political" artists spend so much time developing critical content but then spend little or no time thinking about form or context. The impact of any piece of art is ultimately determined by its audience, and a viewer of art is effected by where and how they see the art as much as by the political content of it. I believe that the gallery space is almost fully absorbed and controlled by art world economic forces.

The clean white walls with discreet and unique objects hanging on them are designed and built to seamlessly blend capitalist economics and "high culture." Even though I don't find galleries libratory spaces, they are completely embedded in even progressive art scenes and are one of the many things in life I compromise on. In my mind some good reasons to work with galleries are to develop relationships with other artists/cultural

producers, in all honesty, to build an exhibition history that might make it easier to make a living as an artist, and also because galleries do cater to an audience that you might not reach from the street.

I don't want to sound like I think that the street is some sort of art utopia. Our society is so fucked up and segregated by race and class, when artists say they "put their art up on the street for all to see," it is a bit of an overstatement. What we think of as public space potentially has as many boundaries as a gallery would. I just believe that those boundaries aren't as fixed. Creating a dialogue in the larger world, even with all its problems, is far more interesting than creating one in a museum or gallery.

Chicago has some draconian laws against the sale of spray paint. How recent are these laws and what effect has it had on street art?

I'm not sure when exactly the city ordinance was passed banning spray paint, but I've been living in Chicago for six years and spray paint has never been sold within city limits since I've been here. Also, being caught with spray paint in your car is immediate grounds for impoundment. Mainly the laws are symbolic, it's only a quick train ride to the suburbs where kids can rack paint, so access isn't the real issue.

The main thing that impacts street art here is the buffing. "Mayor Daley's Graffiti Blasters" is a multi million dollar program that includes dozens of paint-filled tanker trucks that buff graffiti all day, everyday. Free brown paint is handed out to any citizen that wants to paint over graffiti on their property. A year ago the city decided that no graffiti should be visible from the El trains (in Chicago the subway is elevated so there is a good view of rooftops and the sides and backs of buildings) so not only were all rooftops buffed, but all permission walls that

could be seen from the train were buffed as well, many of these were over 10 years old and some of the last remaining living history of Chicago graffiti.

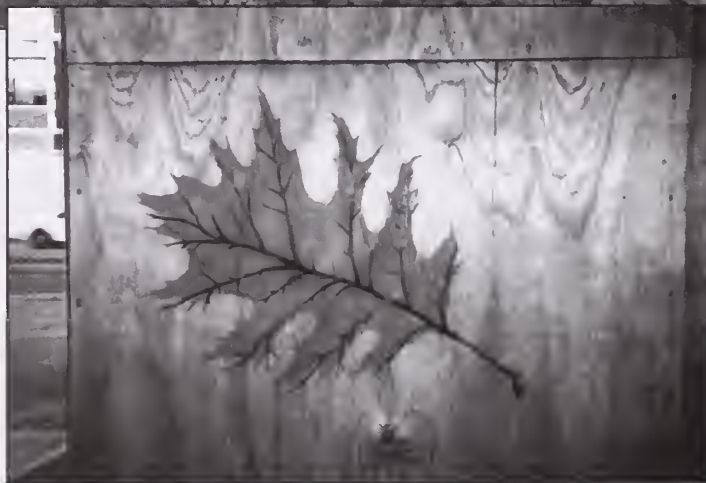
There are still a ton of kids painting and also some wheatpasting that goes on, but because nothing stays up, most of the art has become lowest common denominator, very few pieces, some throwups, mostly tags, scratches, etching, stickers, stuff that is

the next draconian law. The left reacts to the agenda set by the right. I think it important to voice opposition to these attacks from the right, but I also believe it is important at the same time to build alternatives that are motivated by new ideas and visions on how the world might look. What are your thoughts on this broad topic and do examples by artists/activists come to mind?

I agree with you, I think most left organizing is reactive. It is hard not to be when you always feel like you're under attack and defending yourself. Seeing and living how fucked up the world is creates this burning feeling to do something, and to make it effective. This imperative leads to a sense that everything you do has to have some sort of utility, culture included. Our art becomes just another tool to fight the man, and the more direct it attacks our enemies, the better.

Even though I fully understand this, it is still hard to escape from it, because I do want my art to be immediately useful and I do want to help fight (react to) capitalist globalization, state repression, etc. It's hard to think of political artists that do less reacting and more dreaming, or future envisioning, because once you do that, people tend to stop considering you a "political" artist.

I am intrigued by a stencil project that you created of spray painted leaves that were stenciled onto the concrete sidewalks of Chicago. Many stencils that I view hit you over the head with the message (similar to a John Yate's graphic) and do not allow the viewer to come to their own conclusion. The "leaves" stencil seems very open to interpretation. Could you comment on the motivation behind the work and the reactions received.



Celebrate People's History posters beautify an El pole in Chicago (top) and a stenciled leaf enhances some City of Chicago plywood (bottom).

quick and easy. Buffing ensures that artists can't build on each other or create a complex visual public culture, because you are always painting on a clean (brown!) slate.

One thing that I find troubling is the reactionary level of protests and protest art for that matter. The idea that progressive movements are always responding to a crisis, whether it is a war, a trade meeting, or

When I was in high school I was extremely influenced by Yates' *Punchline* magazine, and I think that a lot of my work, for better or for worse, still operates in ways similar to Yates', it's pretty straight forward and didactic. I think I tend to want to send a clear message which simplifies my work, and I also think it is just plain easier if you are a political artist to hit people over the head, to try to tell them what to think rather than get them to ask questions. I try to be pretty aware of this and have really started trying to do more work that isn't so concrete and gives the audience some breathing room. The leaves project was one of my first attempts to really do this. The basic idea was to paint really large scale stencils of leaves all over Chicago. The leaves could be interpreted in a lot of ways, simply as beautiful graphic works, as a jarring contrast between the imagery of a natural leaf and the industrial spraypaint used to paint them, or as a comment on Chicago's lack of trees and wild greenspace. Part of me just really liked the idea of some yuppie calling the city to have them sandblast away a leaf from in front of their condo. As for reactions, like any street art it's hard to tell. Of the dozens and dozens I painted, I'm sure most of them were buffed within days. Most of my artist friends really liked the idea, and people respond well to the photos I have, but I'll never really know how

the random stranger felt when they stumbled upon a 3 foot tall painting of a leaf on a wall behind their apartment. Hopefully it got them thinking about something.

Should all art be political?

Wow, this is an extremely difficult question to answer! I guess it depends on how you define "political?" On one level it's sort of like asking whether all politics should have aesthetics? It's not a question, it's just simply true, all political action does have aesthetics, even if they aren't very well thought out or articulated. So, in some ways all art is political because we can't escape politics, like economics and aesthetics, it is fused with everything in life.

In terms of whether all art should be didactic, or be an attempt to politically educate, that's a different question. I definitely don't feel that all art should be immediately functional, useful to the left, to activists, etc. That may be where my interests lie or what my eye is drawn to, but I wouldn't expect my interests to be the same as everyone else's. My guess is that there will always be art that attempts to speak to "universal values" like love or beauty or whatever, and that's fine.

What interests me more is what happens when art becomes functional? When art is supposed to comment on a very specific

political situation, can it be "wrong." What happens when art argues for bad politics? There is a general assumption that since art is some sort of self-expression, it has some level of inherent value, that art is above the fray of politics, economics, and oppression. But if an artist uses their art to push for a political position that is not libtatory, should they be held accountable? How? By who? These questions can easily raise specters of Hitler's degenerate art show and state censorship. But I'm more interested in looking at a situation like John Heartfield. In discussions with my comrade J, he raised the issue of how Heartfield was clearly an amazing photomontage artist and he generated some of the most memorable graphics in opposition to Hitler yet at the same time he structured the content of his art along Stalinist "united front" political lines and published it in Stalinist magazines. These politics were a failure in effectively organizing the working class of Germany against fascism, so no matter how moving they are, he was helping organize people into the wrong political position. I think this shows that we need to develop a radical culture where artists are forced to debate and discuss the impact of their work, who it reaches, what it says, and what political positions it motivates people towards.

An extended version of this interview, as well as interviews with other political artists, can be read at: www.drawingresistance.org

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I love the 'zines like Rated Rookie...that put out humorous shit."

—Joson Kucsmo, Clomor Magazine



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Traveling



words **Melanie Rubenstein** photos **David Greedy**

1. What's your name?
2. Where are you from?
3. Where are you going?
4. Where have you been?

Any experienced traveler reading this article is most likely chuckling to themselves. The above dialogue is constantly exchanged between newly introduced travelers. One would think that everyone's copy of the *Lonely Planet* guidebook includes this as point one for tips all travelers should be familiar with. I am unsure of how it started, but I do know that nary a day went by when I did not begin a conversation asking and answering the above four questions during my time abroad. The conversation elicits important cultural cues for the new acquaintances:

- a) It allows you to make prejudgments based on the "homeland" of the other person(s) (for example, an Aussie will be a big drinker, an American will be loud, and a Kiwi will be laid back and lots of fun) and
- b) It allows you to determine the other's coolness quotient.

2 Cool 4 U

The "coolness quotient" is an extremely important rating for travelers these days. One achieves their quotient — the higher number, the better — by proving their worth by several means. The first is how long you have been traveling or plan to travel. The longer you are away from home, the cooler you are. Second is the number of destinations you have visited or plan to visit. Obviously, the higher the number, the better. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, is the exoticness of the locations. The more "off the beaten track" a destination is, the cooler you are. A cool traveler doesn't spend a week in Rome, instead you may spend time in healing war zones in The Balkans or biking along the Karakoram Highway. As a general rule, the fewer travelers a particular location has seen, and the less infrastructure there is to support tourism, the cooler you are.

Attaining your coolness quotient is based upon your ability to overcome several barriers: money, time, and local governments. A traveler can have the greatest aspirations to travel the northeast border of Vietnam and China. But if you do not have the capability to bribe the local officials, the time to get your paperwork in order, and the money to procure

the necessary transportation, guides, etc., your dreams will never be realized. Therefore, in a country such as Vietnam (where I spent six weeks), a desire to travel off the beaten path will rarely be realized.

Travelers who attain high coolness quotients may be viewed with envy by other travelers, yet a high coolness quotient does not exempt one from examining his or her role as a traveler.

The Exotic "Other"

If my countless women's studies and interdisciplinary studies courses in university taught me anything, it is to be critical of my environment and most importantly myself. I would be doing a disservice if I merely traveled the world without a care. I need to be critical and honest and understand that, as a white, American woman, there are many privileges afforded to me that others do not have access to. I also need to analyze my complacency with, and participation in, the travelers' identity. Obviously, I also aspire for a high coolness quotient. A glance at my passport is quite telling — I have been to some fairly exotic and out-of-the-ordinary locations. I need to explore, as I wish all travelers would, is why I chose those particular

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locations. What is it about the exotic that attracts me? Furthermore, what political, social, and cultural implications arise when a white, American traveler visits the turf of "the exotic Other?"

Perhaps the lure of the exotic Other can be understood through its use in postcolonial theory. For, "the Other has long been used by philosophers and social scientists to refer to anyone who is not I — the Other actually defines me because it is the ultimate signifier of everything I am not."¹ What is more alluring and mysterious than the opposite of oneself? Many people travel to experience adventure and put themselves in situations which do not exist at home. Home = boring. Therefore, the place least like home will in turn be the most exciting. Also, since many travelers leave home in the first place to escape things (jobs, complacency, boredom, pressure, etc.), logic would dictate that the place least like home would be the most desirable to go to and present the most adventures.

A white European man can get a kick from jumping out of his chauffeured army jeep in order to join the bent women planting rice in the Central Highlands of Vietnam, but does he stop to consider their lives beyond his brief foray in the mud? His life is

not spent toiling 16 hours a day in order to simply produce enough rice for subsistence. For him, spending five minutes with the Vietnamese women is merely a story to tell at the local pub; such is the traveler's privilege. This is an important point: although not every traveler who jumps in the mud as an attempt to bridge boundaries is necessarily guilty of viewing it only as a notch on the headboard, so to speak, it is an option that is open to you. As a privileged traveler, you may view it as merely an experience and a lark. The local person, however, cannot go to the pub, tell a story, and move onto the next adventure. And, unfortunately, I tend to think that very few travelers stop to consider their role in the cultural consumption of the countries they are visiting.

In what ways are we disrupting the natural cultural dialogues that would happen by imposing our ethnocentricities, schedules, and money onto unsuspecting and, at times, unwelcoming cultures? What lasting implications occur as the children grow and point to their waists and the side of their legs (places where travelers generally stash their money) and make the international "money symbol" by rubbing their forefinger and thumb together as soon as they see a white person?

Brother, Can You Spare Some Change?

Many travelers look with disgust upon the "rich tourists" who travel around in their air-conditioned buses and only stay at five star establishments. They refuse to even try the local cuisine and stock up on souvenirs at every stop. A paternalistic "ally," however, can do more harm than those who do not pretend to be your friend. Let's take, for example, begging. As I mentioned above, it is overwhelmingly poor communities that are seen as attractive (due to the phenomenon of the "exotic Other") to thrill-seeking, alterna-travelers. When rich tourists visit these villages, they understand the process. They are there to gawk at the "primitive ways," pay in order to take some pictures, maybe buy a trinket, and move on. We radicals, however, usually view it as a different game. We want to "experience" culture, not merely be spectators. Therefore, we want to sit and chat. We wish to take pictures, but would never ever pay.

Take, for example, the town of Banaue in the Northern Philippines. For years this city has been visited, photographed, and intruded upon so that white folks can gaze upon the UNESCO World Heritage designated rice terraces. As a result of the seemingly limitless amount of tourists, some Ifugao tribe

continued next page

members (the tribe indigenous to the area) don traditional clothing and pose in front of a backdrop of the "Stairway to the Sky" terraces. Nearly all of the people who do this would not wear the clothing on a day-to-day basis if not for the tourists. In a way, they are prostituting their culture and traditions in the name of the almighty dollar (or peso). The young radical traveler does not want to contribute to the incursion of begging and corruption of cultures. Therefore, we snap our picture (with or without the "exotic Other" in the frame) and bypass the children with their hands outstretched.

Additionally, we tend to view begging as an unfortunate and disgusting by-product of tourism. Begging can ruin and adulterate the culture. Instead, many of us find ourselves engaging in capitalism as a remedy to begging. In Cambodia, people have to pay to send their children to school. In many cases, the children themselves are the ones who end up working — whether it be in a Gap factory or selling postcards at Angkor Wat. The town of Siem Reap is the richest in Cambodia with several traffic lights and well-paved roads. Naturally, many poor Cambodians flock there to find work or to beg. Nearly everywhere you go you see remnants of America's "secret" bombing campaign during the Vietnam War — mainly in the form of people with missing limbs. Many of these people sit on the street or go from restaurant to restaurant begging for money. I never gave. Again, begging = bad to the cool traveler. However, if there was an exchange of goods, somehow it wasn't begging; it was working. Many children sell extremely cheap and poorly

made postcards. I bought several packages of them. I am unaware how much profit the children were making, but because they were "willing to work for it," I felt good about giving. Capitalism: if I can get something for it, I do not mind parting with my Thai Baht or Cambodian Riels.

But which is the better attitude? Pay to take pictures and contribute to beggars, or not? Ah! That is the eternal question. I do not want to attempt to speak for anyone, so I am not going to answer it. However, I tend to agree with Lonely Planet's advice about not perpetuating a culture of begging. But that is easy for me to denounce as a privileged American. I enjoy the freedom to decide whether to donate some money. How many choices do the young Cambodians who lost their parents due to the Khmer Rouge have? Is it fair of me to judge them for doing what they need to do to survive?

Desiring (Ex)change

Since it is usually the homes of the poor people of color that are most attractive to the traveler looking to up her/his coolness quotient, often it is those who are most likely the object of oppression who lose the most in the name of globalization and travel. And it is my bet that a vast majority of those travelers that participate in this damage are also people who attempt to actively oppose the very structures they uphold by way of their travels.

So, if traveling is so problematic, why do it in the first place? Although ignorance and an unwillingness to examine one's actions are

not an excuse, I do believe that most travelers have the best intentions. Participating in an exchange of ideas and cultures is an exciting and rewarding process. One cannot go into it blindly, however. Although you think it's wonderful to intrude into someone's house, drink tea, and ask them how much money they make harvesting shrimp, you must understand that by doing so you are imposing your desire for exchange on the other person. Although they may be happy to answer your questions and ask some themselves, cultural customs must be upheld. If you expect to be invited into someone's house, understand that you are in their house, not yours. Be well-versed in appropriate dress, eating habits, and behaviors for accepting presents. Take a moment and think of how comfortable you would be with someone entering your home who doesn't speak your language, sits on your bed, and asks you how much money you earn a year. There is a thin line between curiosity and intrusiveness.

Obviously, I believe that traveling is an amazing opportunity that should be taken advantage of. I will keep traveling and hope to make my life's work abroad. But I think it's important to discuss the aspects of traveling which nearly everyone faces but most are too embarrassed to admit or too ignorant to realize. ☆

Endnotes

¹ Childers, Joseph and Hentzi, Gary. *The Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995.

REVIEW REVOLUTIONARY ROAD

Off the Map

Kika and Hibickina
CrimethInc., 2003
www.crimethinc.com

"This is what it means to be an adventurer in our day: to give up creature comforts of the mind, to realize possibilities of imagination."

So begins the magical adventure of two women trekking, sans map, through Europe with nothing but the packs on their backs and a belief in the angels they hope to meet along their way. Originally published as a half-size, 98-page zine, *Off the Map* details the travels of Kika and Hibickina, two 20-something's from Washington on a European journey.

For Kika and Hibickina, the one-way tickets to the Netherlands are the keys to lives they have dreamed of. They envision a month on the road, culminating in a final arrival in Prague, where Hibickina plans to stay, and where Kika will visit before moving to Barcelona. They have little money but a true desire to do it all as simply as possible; breaking all the rules of conventional travel, they travel on foot, helped by the kindness of motorists along the way.

The motorists, a parade of charitable angels, each add their own dimension, coaxing us to

realize that everyone, indeed, has a story to tell. Jean-Pierre is a wanderer-turned-truck driver who longingly describes the 40 years he spent living life on the road. Geoff is a painfully shy and accident-prone Englishman who dreams of a family, of daughters of his own. Each character encountered reflects a little bit of everyone; after all, everyone has had a dream, and everyone, despite their best intentions has seen one vanish.

As they travel the squatter's circuit, following only graffiti symbols and directions given by others, the authors bring us into an underground world — an alternate reality where what *could* be usually isn't, and where women barely register on the collective radar. Both women are frustrated by their invisibility and by the sexism of the punks they meet. They envision, instead, a community comprised of miscellaneous travelers, punks and adventurers, a place where people rally around the same ideals and actually work to uphold them.

Undaunted, Kika and Hibickina follow this vision. They believe in magic, in the idea that the universe (through human kindness) will provide

for them. They, in turn, receive much more than they dreamed, more than food and shelter; they receive experiences. While they never actually find the community they dreamed of within the confines of a squat, they come to know it instead through the relationship they have with each other as well as the various strangers they meet along their way.

Our heroines possess true adventurousness and a sincere desire to make things happen. *Off the Map* is more than a travel story, although that alone makes it worth reading. Unlike many travel narratives, it lacks bravado. In its place, we find something much more valuable and refreshing: quiet, steadfast ideals. *Community is*

the world we live in... anyone could be an angel. In reading, we are given a glimpse into another way of traveling, and a sense of possibility and hope. In the words of Anais Nin, "Dreams are necessary to life." After reading *Off the Map*, you realize that they can, indeed, be one and the same.

-Lisa Kilmer





Why Shopping Locally Matters

(especially when you're not a local)

Responsible travel advocates encourage tourists to shop locally. Why? Why is it somehow ethically superior to stay at a small locally owned hotel than at one which is part of a large chain? Why is it responsible to buy products from local craftspeople rather than from a factory in the city? Why should one eat locally grown foods rather than international imports?

For some travelers, the answer is that buying locally helps them feel like they are contributing to the lives of people they know. Taking that a step further, buying locally is one way travelers can express their political viewpoint by encouraging local control and minimizing cash leakage away from small communities.

Making economic decisions means taking for granted that money is not evil, and that it is helpful for people in rural, developing countries to get their hands on some. There are those who argue against this, who claim that

switching to a cash-based economy ruins a culture. It certainly does change a place. But to the people who live in agrarian villages, the majority of these changes are viewed as improvements. (Dirt farming and poverty may have a romantic appeal to Westerners, but they are not so charming to those who live with them.) Cash can help people send

their children to school, buy tin roofs that require little upkeep, install plumbing to bring in clean water, and perhaps even afford medical care. So, if one of our goals as thoughtful travelers is to not only do no harm to the places we visit, but also to contribute to the development desired by locals, then allowing them to keep as much money as possible should inform our purchasing decisions.

Nepal is an excellent example. Trekking is a huge industry in Nepal, with over 10,000 trekkers hiking into the Langtang region alone each year. Himalayan mountain people, whose villages and paths trekkers use, make money from tourism by renting out bed space, selling meals, hot showers, and other comforts. They also

bear the brunt of the impact of tourism, including environmental degradation, such as deforestation (since more fuelwood is needed to cook for trekkers); cultural losses, such as turning religious ceremonies into commodities performed for paying foreign onlookers; and social changes, such as the adaptation of



Western languages and clothing. Since the mountain people bear the impact, it seems fair that they should reap the financial rewards. Their actual economic gain, however, is minimal, and this is partially due to choices we make as tourists.

Tourism is organized with most of the decision-making infrastructure based in the country of departure (usually the U.S. or some European nation). Because of that, the largest percentage of one's tourist dollar doesn't reach the owner of a foreign guesthouse. For example, a potential trekker goes to a New York travel agency, books a flight to Kathmandu, and hires a trekking guide. The guide leads the trekker into the mountains where, because of competition, the guide and the tourist stay in tea houses for a dollar a night, or less, drinking Chinese beer and taking kerosene-powered hot showers. After the trek, the guide is paid off and the tourist lingers in Kathmandu buying souvenirs to take home.

It's a great month-long vacation. At least, it was great for the tourist. But what about for everybody else involved? Where did the money go? The money for the airplane ticket, of course, went to the airline, which means it most likely stayed in the U.S. or Europe. The money for hiring the guide was split between the tourist's travel agency, the agency they work with in Nepal, and the guide himself. The money for the souvenirs purchased in Kathmandu stayed in Kathmandu. Of the money spent in the mountains, the tea house owners had to pay a percentage to retailers for beer and kerosene, a percentage to the porters for hauling the stuff in on their backs, and another percentage for anything else purchased for the use of the trekker that could not be manufactured or grown at that village. This is the important part: whatever was brought into the village had to be purchased from somewhere else and therefore takes money away from the village. If we hope to allow local people to keep as much of our money as possible, then the solution is to try to limit one's purchases of imports and concentrate one's spending on locally-produced goods. In other words, when you buy a beer, the tea-house owner is going to keep only a small percentage of the rupees that you hand over. On the other hand, if you eat potatoes that your landlady has grown, she keeps all of it.

The way tourists spend money is one half of the equation. The other half requires villagers to organize themselves. Studies done by The Mountain Institute show that in some Nepali mountain villages, only 20 cents out of every trekker's dollar stays in the community. That is 80 percent cash leakage. This comes about for a few reasons: the dependence on imported goods, the lack of available crafts for sale locally, and most importantly, the lack of community organizations to set prices and deter undercutting. In a well-organized village, and one in which locally grown produce is used to feed tourists, the cash leakage is closer to 50 percent.

While none of us as travelers passing through will have the time to organize the local community, it is always helpful to find the name of the NGO attempting to do so, and to offer help in the form of cash or as a volunteer. The organization of local businesses has proved to be a great tool for minimizing cash leakage and for providing community benefits from tourism. Setting minimal prices for beds and meals (prices that are shared by all the village's guesthouses), as well as creating local foods or crafts that are available for sale to tourists, helps to ensure that funds are widely distributed within the village.

What we do have control over while traveling is where and how we spend our money. Of course it is impossible (impossible and unnecessary) to buy only locally made goods and foods. Even though most of the money leaves the village, there still is a small profit on that beer you drank. But as a traveler, you have the potential to maximize the local profit, which can better help people's economic lives. Buying locally can help the rural poor send their kids to school, buy warm clothes, and maybe someday make enough money to travel to your town and buy something from you. ★

To the Indigenous Pueblos and all Communities in Resistance in Mexico, Mesoamerica, and South America:

To the People in Resistance in North America:

To the National and International Press:

We are a group of anti-capitalists from around the East, South, and Midwest regions of the land occupied by the United States government. We are women, men, gender queers, straight, queer, parents, children, young, old, people of color, white, privileged, underprivileged. From June 6 to 8, 2003 we met to discuss our response and resistance to the upcoming Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) ministerial slated to take place in Miami, Florida November 20 to 21, 2003. As a result of our collective discussion, we declare the following:

We stand with all those in resistance to government and corporate powers that control, dominate, and occupy our lives, resources, and lands.

We reject the Free Trade Area of the Americas because it will:

- Diminish biodiversity and ecological integrity;
- Exploit people across the world — women, children, and people of color in particular;
- Decrease workers' rights, safety, and the right to organize;
- Limit mobility of immigrants while allowing capital to move more freely;
- Threaten the existence and autonomy of indigenous communities;
- Undermine the self-determination of all communities.

We reject privatization schemes for water, health care, and other essential public services.

We reject the militarization of all nations, which plays an inherent and essential role in maintaining a capitalist order. We also reject wars between nations that serve to cement that order.

We reject police violence and repression in our communities and attacks on civil liberties in the United States.

We reject the Plan Puebla Panamá (PPP) and any corporate centered development projects that do not consider the needs and desires of the communities they affect.

We declare ourselves in solidarity with those who protest the upcoming World Trade Organization (WTO) meetings in Cancún, México.

We will vigorously mobilize to shut down the FTAA ministerial meetings in Miami, November 2003.

We are confident in our struggle — the CEOs and the government officials who do their bidding are few, we are 6,000,000,000.

We issue this declaration to inspire effective resistance to global capitalism just as we are inspired by the many faces of resistance in Latin America and Mexico to create a world with dignity for all people. The communities of autonomy and joy emerging from our struggles are not bound by state or country lines, and in Miami we will cultivate this spirit throughout the Americas — for all our sakes!

-The Louisville Consulta
June 8, 2003



OUTBREAK

TOURISM IN TORONTO'S DAYS OF SARS

If you were thinking about traveling to Toronto any time between March and July of this year, you might have been scared away by the threat of SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome). For a period of several months, SARS presented the (surgical-masked) face of Toronto to the world. The city's image was looking especially flushed following the April decision by the World Health Organization (WHO) to slap a travel advisory warning against "non-essential" travel (i.e. tourism) to Toronto. While SARS was enough to give out-of-towners pause while making their travel plans, residents of Toronto know that the greater threat to health is posed by right-wing governments that have gutted health care and social services.

It's not that all levels of government — federal, provincial, and local — didn't try to get your disposable tourist dollars into the pockets of Toronto's hotel, theatre, and restaurant owners, of course. In fact, that's pretty much all they did. Concerns for tourism dominated governmental approaches to the crisis as their efforts focused almost exclusively on ways to sell Toronto to the world, or, as the Canadian Prime Minister so eloquently put it, "to reassure the people that you can go to Toronto." Unfortunately, this invitation was only reluctantly extended to people traveling from Asia, where the crisis had first gained attention. Racism against people identified as Asians included isolation of travelers coming from Vietnam where SARS had been well controlled and no outbreak had occurred.

Overall, the SARS outbreaks in Toronto shone a harsh light on the inadequacies and outright failures of neo-liberal public health policies and practices. They also showed clearly the extent to which governments prioritize business security above the health and social security of workers.

NEO-LIBERALISM MAKES US SICK

Toronto public health officials distributed information about SARS to Toronto hospitals in early February. By late April, Ontario's Premier, Ernie Eves, had not even recalled the legislature, which had been on hiatus since Christmas, to devise a plan for dealing with the various aspects of the crisis. For weeks, the province's plan appeared to consist of little more than suggestions to "wash your hands" or "eat in Chinatown" (a sad attempt to defuse the SARS racism that governments had helped to foster).

The government only responded to SARS after the public relations embarrassment of the WHO's warning and the threat of losses for tourist industry owners. Prior to that, they seemed rather unconcerned about the developing crisis.

As Tom Baker, a national representative for the Nursing and Allied Health Staff Union noted, the Tories' privatization of front-line health services played a major part in the province's inability to keep up with the outbreak and in its detachment from local officials. Likewise, street nurses Cathy Crowe and Kathy Hardill note that the "polarization of community health activists and public health officials," resulting from cuts to the public health infrastructure, has been "detrimental to creating a cohesive response to this [SARS] crisis." Cuts to health care which put systems under greater strain left fewer resources to pick up the extra work, resulting in delays for people requiring other services.

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The problems caused by the lack of public health resources were compounded by the failure of any level of government to compensate workers who had to go under quarantine and the failure to compensate anyone who was not quarantined but thought they had symptoms and should stay home from work. Similarly, nothing was forthcoming to assist tenants facing evictions or people unable to make utilities payments due to SARS layoffs or work cutbacks. That this failure played a part in the spread of SARS in Toronto, and in the spread of panic over SARS, was highlighted when an infected nurse from Mount Sinai hospital took public transit to work on April 14 and 15 because she could not afford to miss work.

TOURISM: TORONTO'S MAGIC PILL

That the government was more concerned with helping tourist industry bosses rather than workers was clear in who received compensation or subsidy packages. The government largesse shown to entertainment magnates and hotel companies, through subsidies to ticket prices, did not extend to workers in food, entertainment, and hotel industries who were affected by layoffs or lost hours. As late as May 27, Hotel Employees, Restaurant Employees (HERE) Local 75 were still requesting meetings with federal Industry Minister Allan Rock and Human Resources Minister Jane Stewart. Local 75 president Paul Clifford noted: "There have been no additional funds from senior levels of government directed towards hospitality workers. No EI (employment insurance) funds, no waiving of the two-week waiting period for EI, no relaxing of EI regulations, and many workers and their families are going under" (quoted in McGran, 2003b: A6).

Instead, the federal government offered such symbolic support as holding a cabinet meeting at an exclusive Toronto hotel. Other responses were little more than gimmicks, including the proposal to pay the Rolling Stones \$10 million of public money to put on a free concert. Ironically, this was the same amount as the total federal relief package to compensate laid-off and quarantined workers and affected small businesses. Luckily, the populace was spared having to deal with SARS and Keith Richards simultaneously when Mick and the

boys refused to help out for anything less than the \$10M.

Media played up the false notion that the tourist trade was all important to Toronto's economy. Tourism in Toronto had been ill for some time before the SARS outbreak. A spokesperson for the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC), which runs the city's subway and buses, noted that the TTC had experienced a general city-wide falloff in ridership prior to any word of SARS.

Like the entertainment industry giants, the TTC was not about to lose an opportunity. Promoting downtown events among Torontonians, the transit commission urged residents to "find out what it's like to be a tourist in your own town." The TTC public address system broadcast messages from prominent Torontonians encouraging its 800,000 riders to "wine, dine, entertain, and shop in Toronto." Suggestions for being a hometown tourist included, in a familiar vein, going to the theatre, trying a new restaurant, and, incredibly, staying in a hotel. These 20-second messages were broadcast every 15 minutes in 69 subway stations. So, again, capital's cure for whatever ails you is to go shopping. This was, of course, reminiscent of George W. Bush's plea for Americans to go shopping after 9-11.

SARS simply provided a fortuitous cover for governments at all levels to obscure the relation of government policies, and the whims of investors and speculators, to economic troubles in Ontario. Two key factors behind recent economic concerns have received almost no mention: the Canadian dollar and rising electricity costs. The dollar's increase in value has played a far greater part in the tourism drop than SARS and has also affected demand in the United States, which takes 85 percent of Canadian exports. The dollar surged from a record low of 62.1 cents (US) in January to a six-year high of 74 cents (US) in May. At the same time, the deregulation of utilities has resulted in a doubling of electricity costs for many companies, raising costs to twice the levels in Quebec.

SOME SURGERY REQUIRED

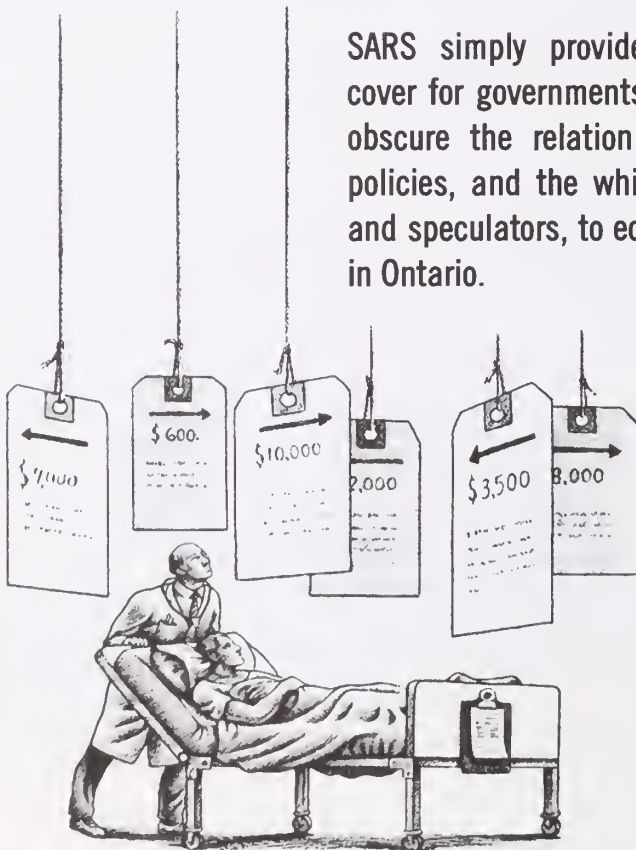
The impact of SARS will more likely be political rather than economic as it has exposed the lack of concern for public health and workers' standards of living.

In fact, much of the fearful image of Toronto under SARS was built up by Ontario's public security commissioner, Jim Young. Police in front of closed hospitals did little to lessen the perception of risk or crisis. Statements by the province played up the crisis and may have been crucial in getting the WHO advisory in the first place.

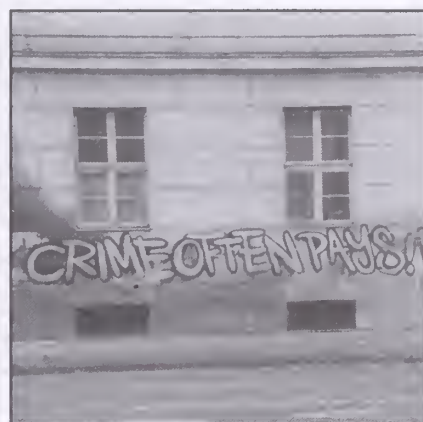
Even worse, the province's rush to proclaim the crisis over following the WHO advisory seems to have played a major part in a renewed outbreak during the end of May. During the second outbreak, more than 7,000 were quarantined, and compensation packages have still not been made available by any level of government for those affected. Finally, during the second outbreak, after weeks of serving stress-filled overtime shifts and suffering some of the city's highest infection rates, nurses, through their union, put forward a demand for danger pay.

Anger over government handling of the outbreak may play a part in the provincial elections to be set, most likely for later this year. Tellingly, Premier Eves cancelled his election announcement, which had been planned for the week in which the second outbreak occurred, lest the election become a referendum on Tory health care policies. Still, anger over the Tory bungling of the SARS crisis is running high, extending into their support base among suburban consumers in the regions surrounding Toronto. It appears likely that Ontario's voters will choose to do a little elective surgery in the fall. Only then might it really be safe to travel to Toronto. ★

SARS simply provided a fortuitous cover for governments at all levels to obscure the relation of government policies, and the whims of investors and speculators, to economic troubles in Ontario.



arttoday.com



having a few words with the author of *Evasion*

The author of *Evasion* has a few stories to tell, a few things to brag about — writing one of the most widely reproduced zines ever, sneaking backstage at more than a few prestigious concerts and events, turning his story of petty crime and vagabond travel into a five-page feature in the world's largest book magazine, negotiating rights to a film based on his story, and this avowed scam artist has pulled the greatest scam of all — turning his stories of scamming and hitchhiking into a counterculture phenomenon. His book, *Evasion*, has sold 12,000 copies to date, bringing more than a few kids to quit their jobs and hop a freight train out of Springfield forever. A few things to brag about, yes, but you'll never hear him do this. In fact you'll never hear him say anything. No one knows who he is. Crediting his writing only to "Anonymous," until recently he has remained largely just that. After a year and a half of mystery, "Mack" — the only name you'll get out of him — has agreed to come out for this interview.

interview by **Ricky Powell**

CLAMOR: Among the DIY/punk/activist circles in which Evasion circulates, there is a lot of mystery and speculation surrounding you as an author. Why did you decide to author the book as "Anonymous," and why are you only now coming out?

Mack: The image of me as an underground recluse has no clear origin. There is really no aversion to readership contact; my personal contact information is in the back of all 12,000 *Evasion* books. I've done two book tours and read to over a thousand people. The original goal of *Evasion*'s "By: Anonymous" choice was a sort of "he could be anyone" mystique. I think this remains, for the most part, intact.

You've found yourself thrust into the eye of a storm of criticism amongst activist/anarchist circles for your promotion of traveler culture — dumpster diving, hitchhiking, shoplifting, and scams. On one hand, I feel these can be valuable tools for self-liberation and escape from monotony of nine-to-five life, but Evasion also has been criticized for encouraging hedonistic pursuits. Do you advocate lifestyle activism, or can Evasion-style tactics complement more pro-active efforts for change?

All the noise about *Evasion* can be quieted by understanding what *Evasion* is: a personal narrative. So it's not a revolutionary program. It's a personal account of my life as a voluntarily unemployed 20-something vegan straight-edge kid. It is, essentially, the story of one person who developed a critique of this culture, a responsive course of action, and went for it. Understanding this, if *Evasion* has any significance beyond literature, it's this: something to offer direction — one direction, of many — to a person who wishes to work less and live

First, I think I'll fall under attack if I didn't point out there was Iggy Scam before me and Aaron Cometbus before him, and we could trace the lineage of *Evasion* back to Abbie Hoffman before both. Prankster/outlaw/vagabond memoir-literature is timeless. Traveling continues to be important to me, but I have not ever, nor do I now, identify with traveler kid culture. I was never involved with the anarcho/crust/pseudo-activist/scenester cult many would identify me with. When it comes with dreadlocks, a bandana in its back pocket, and holds a 40 oz., I run. It's just a basic feeling this scene has nothing to do with my life. I'm speaking of most every traveling punk I've met when I say the traveling culture is focused on hanging out. One thing about my early writing, something that remains important to me, is that much of my traveling was done alone. The emphasis was on the experience. I still choose to travel alone at least half the time, but for many of the kids I meet now, it's a social scene. Hopping trains from punk house to punk house. Great, I guess, but I don't really stay at punk houses, or eat Food Not Bombs, or go to radical conferences. I support those things, but they are not stimulating to me. I wouldn't doubt maybe a few kids have read *Evasion* and decided to model their life from it. Is this positive? Dumpster diving reduces consumption, so I feel good about that. I like the idea of people maybe taking a shortcut to their dreams via a little reallocation of goods, like the kid in Louisville who told me his passion was music and, after reading "*Evasion*," walked into one of those chain music stores and walked out with a guitar! I can say I've hardly had a bad day since I quit my last job eight years ago and I think most people would be better for doing the same. I've gotten several "Read '*Evasion*,' went vegan" letters, and those are the greatest. Then there are *Evasion* readers who come away just knowing better tactics for stealing beer. You take the good with the bad.

Throughout the book you make frequent reference to being vegan and straight-edge (no drugs or alcohol). Why I can see how this ties into the book's broader message of self-liberation, I found the delivery at times condescending. Why did you see a need to work this into the narrative? Is there a need for harsh moral judgment over a personal choice?

Absolutely. The largest holocaust in the history of the world is taking place right now and it's caused by the consumption of animal products. I think I owe the victims of animal exploitation my voice of opposition, not only to the system directly responsible for their deaths, but also the culture which tolerates this, and on down to the consumers who consume them. If to call it wrong is to be insulting, well then, people need to look at why someone would feel strongly enough about it to say this. 99% of the suffering on this planet would vanish with the

end of animal agriculture and biomedical research. I burn for the day when eating meat, drinking milk, and wearing leather isn't a choice; when culturally it just isn't tolerated, the same way rape and lynching of blacks is today. It's all the same. The master race mentality of the animal abuser in all his forms (meat eater, dairy farmer, etc.) is not just analogous to Nazism, it is directly congruent. We will soon view the slaughterhouse with the same shame we view the gas chambers, the drinking of milk with the same contempt as rape. The urgency of mass animal-slaughter is too great for tolerance. There is nothing condescending in condemning the eating of animals or drinking of their milk. Once made aware of the horrors behind these foods, all who continue are despicable in my eyes. Straight-edge is a personal choice. I'm really not interested in debating the merits of intoxication because I don't care; it's easy for me to simply ignore those people. I'd like it to be understood this is not a position of arrogance, there's just nothing enriching about the company of someone who chooses drunkenness or getting high (beyond extreme moderation). It's indicative of a gross lack of creativity, of a submissive, slave-like sheep mentality, and I don't like to be around it.

Evasion was released in the fall of 2001. Bring us up to date with your doings — writing, traveling, and rent-free living arrangements — in the last year and a half.

Since the book release, I've been on two band tours, two book tours, ridden in a stolen car, almost got arrested a few times, hung out backstage at the Blink 182 concert dressed as a pizza man, and a lot of writing for the next "*Evasion*." It's almost done. 50,000 words of my life living in a broom closet on the campus of a prestigious university, an account of the daily comedy of poverty in one of the nation's wealthiest communities. Sun, sand, surf, free food, and having to dress really nice all the time to avoid a fifth thing — jail! I'm forgoing the short stories this time for a true saga, with all the crucial elements of *Evasion* — having nowhere to sleep, eating garbage, being totally homeless and laughing it off, etc. It's going to be epic. ★

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An extended version of this interview can be read at www.clamormagazine.org

REVIEW AUDIO PERSPECTIVE

Arundhati Roy
Come September
AK Press Audio/Alternative Tentacles 2003
www.akpress.org or www.alternativetentacles.com

As the high tide of the war and the anti-war recedes, we are slowly granted perspective and hindsight. A situation is always clearer when you are not in the eye of it, especially in a situation as convoluted and personal as the War on Terror has become. Arundhati Roy's *Come September* offers a foundation for contemplation by dredging up all the pre-September 11th secrets that may help fill in the gaps of our convolutions.

Roy is an Indian author, essayist, and — when we're lucky — speaker. In this 2002 speech, MC'ed by the equally distinguished Howard Zinn, Roy dissects the relationship between power and powerlessness, citizens and the state, nationalism and anti-nationalism. By pointing out all of the unrest and injustice occurring in the Middle East, South America, Asia and Africa for countless Septembers past, Roy says to America "in the gentlest, most human way, welcome to the world." She explains that this mess we are



facing goes way deeper than 9-11 or Hussein, and to understand the past two years, one must also consider the past one hundred.

Zinn describes Roy's own power best in his introduction. He points out that despite the acclaim of her novel, *God of Small Things*, Roy did not continue to use her beautiful, poetic talent to write more fiction — rather she turned to nonfiction. The result (*Come September*, for one) is a brutally raw view of the world ironically emphasized by the elegance and eloquence of her words. After years of desensitizing news stories, factoids, and graphs, Roy's voice forces a shocking reality check that no ticker tape news or flag-waving TV special could ever emulate.

Come September is not meant to be popped in at whim. It should be stashed away for two months, two years, ten years — when you begin to forget how you feel right now, how you felt two years ago. Then, hopefully, we can continue to gain perspective.

—Abbie Jarman

Come September is available in the online *Clamor* store at www.clamormagazine.org. This CD is also available as a free premium for any donations made to *Clamor*. Donations can be made online using your credit card or by sending a check to: *Clamor* :: PO Box 20128 :: Toledo, OH 43610

Converge

Unloved and Weeded Out (CD or 4X7")

Deathwish, Inc.

www.deathwishinc.com

This record is a collection of hard-to-find and previously unreleased Converge tracks spanning the band's efforts from 1994 to 2002. Like all Converge releases, we have here a high degree of craftsmanship in all areas (including a gorgeous layout), making this work stand on its own, a welcome addition to the already expansive Converge repertoire.

The re-released tracks from '94-'97, which many will be unfamiliar with, are an awesome supplement to *Caring and Killing* and the monumental *Petitioning the Empty Sky*. The live and demo versions of songs we already know are also well worth having, especially the sped-up live version of "Locust Reign."

This release reminds me once again of why I love Converge. There are moments of straight-up metallic hardcore and then there are moments when Converge tread further into an atmosphere of ecstatic, raging bliss.

I'm just really glad that this retrospective comes at a time when Converge is alive and kicking and ready to push beyond what they have done in the past and unto new terrain in the metalcore landscape.

- mike m.

Dead Things

... Because Sometimes You Just Want to Ride Your Bike to the Show

Slave Records

www.slavemagazine.com

Last year, my ol' lady's best friend, Samia, fell out of a tree and broke her back. Even though I'd only hung out with her a few times, I felt like I needed to play chicken soup maker and do some small thing to make her feel better. According to the story, Samia fell while drunkenly jumping from the roof of her house to the tree like tarzan. Even though Samia's not 7 (she's 24), she figured it would be fun to build a house in the tree, just like a bird. That's rad. She's rad! I like her.

I also like making tapes for people. For Samia I made a "power anthems" tape that, I hoped, would embody a certain feeling: "Any Way You Want It," live, with Steve Perry handing the mike over to the kids; "Surrender," with all the screaming Jap teens going completely out of their fuckin' minds; "Jessie's Girl" (more for the "A Long Way Down" film at the end of Boogie Nights than anything else); the cymbals in "Goodbye Stranger;" the buildup to the chorus in "Fallen Angel;" Coverdale screaming that last nut-busting verse in "Here I Go Again..."

Hey, good music can be good healing, and I wanted to fill this motherfucker with that feeling.

Dead Things embody that spirit. They're so completely over the top, every one of their songs DEMANDS hyperbole and exclamation marks. I think I probably already like Dead Things more than any other band I've ever reviewed! Their songs remind me of my idiot friends back home drunkenly jumping over bonfires, or a gang of punks I knew called the Paul Baloff Heavy Crew (in honor of late Exodus singer, Paul Baloff, who used to shout things like "this ain't the Arsenio Hall show... fuckin' destroy something!!" during their sets) bombing cops in Quebec City with bricks and singing Exodus lyrics. Dead

Things are like ten thousand of these little vignettes. The best part: they're not coke-driven megalomaniacs who skip their own concerts and piss on fans and break the band up when the going is good. They're punks, just like us. They'll probably play forever and, if not, a few of us will remember them for that long. Dead Things are so awe-inspiring they reportedly did (or planned to do) a SOUTHERN TOUR ON THEIR BIKES!!! and if I believed in that "butterfly flaps its wings in Malaysia" shit, I'd probably think that's what healed Samia's back, because it's all better now!!

- gibby peach

Elliott

Song in the Air

Revelation Records, 2003

www.RevelationRecords.com

I was like a little kid on Christmas morning when I got this one. Elliott has long been one of the best bands on the planet in my opinion, and I could not wait to hear their latest effort. Their previous album, *False Cathedrals*, was the kind of masterpiece that makes you stop whatever you're doing and just listen... that shakes you to your very depths and makes you hold your breath hoping it won't end. So I was worried that there was no way they could improve, and that *Song in the Air* would be a disappointment. Not the case at all. While I'm still not sure if it's as amazing as *False Cathedrals*, all of the elements or their sound are in place — the combination of the best in melodic emotional hardcore and The Cure style depth/atmosphere, and Chris Higdon still sings with the voice of an angel. The lyrics are just as good as they have ever been, even if more sparsely used on this record [some of the songs have very little lyrics at all, and two of the ten tracks are instrumentals]. They added a string section, including members of Rachel's, which just serves to add even more depth to the songs. This is a must-hear.

-Robbie Annese

Envy / Iscariote

split 10"

Pure Pain Sugar and Code of Ethics Records

codeofethicsrecs@hotmail.com

Let's hear it for punk internationalism! There ain't nothing like a trilingual punk 10" to remind you that our scene lives outside borders. It also helps that this happens to rock really hard.

This is a split between Iscariote (France) and Envy (Japan) and is complemented by a lovingly-made fold-out sleeve with lyrics in Japanese, French and English.

To be honest, I'm not really sure what language Envy and Iscariote are singing in. But intelligible vocals have never been a high priority for me in detecting a quality punk record.

These bands belong together. Both play tight and driven emotive hardcore. Iscariote rocks the Botch-style ironic, discordant guitar and throws in good helpings of chug-chugging, distorted rocknroll grooving and melody. On side B, Envy has struck that cathartic balance of sadness and hope that has defined so much incredible hardcore punk. Soft singing and contemplative harmonies are intertwined with blazing melodic hardcore jams.

- mike m.

Garrison

The Silhouette

Revelation Records, 2003

www.RevelationRecords.com

For the past few weeks, I'd been reading stories about Boston's Garrison disappearing after taking a plane to deliver coloured vinyl and relief supplies to the Spanish Antilles. Everything from one band member sacrificing the rest as an offering to the baseball gods, hoping to save the Red Sox to the band moving to Cuba and supporting Castro. The press release I got with this CD said that they recorded it while on the plane, just before the plane crashed into the ocean. Well, I don't know if I'd believe all that, but I do know that this record is solid. Garrison have been around for a few years and seem like they get better with every release. The lyrics are the sort that seem personal and obscure, yet the listener can relate to them as well. Musically, they sound somewhat like Far and a bit like later Cave-in. Basically, if you are into any sort of post-punk, post-hardcore, post-whatever rock music, pick this up and you won't be disappointed.

-Robbie Annese

Jaga Jazzist

The Stix

Ninja Tune

www.ninjatune.net

This ten-person Norwegian ensemble mixes electronica and jazz, providing the beat with both drums and drum machines. Sampled beats are present in over half of the cuts, giving them a "choppy" sound. There is also a good bit of non-jazz sounding keyboards and effects.

In front of the beats, though, are beautiful melodies provided by vibraphone, keyboards, horns, and electric guitar. There are also some bass clarinet, sax, Fender bass, a Therenim effect, and assorted percussion instruments. Despite the unusual sound, this is not "free" jazz. The pieces are tightly arranged, at times giving a hint of lounge or "living room" jazz.

The ten cuts on this CD, all instrumental, blend into each other to resemble a suite. It is surprising how seamlessly Jaga Jazzist combine jazz with electronic sounds and effects. The beats back up the faster portions and drop out for slower parts that only feature a few instruments, such as two keyboards.

Jaga Jazzist has become well known for live performances in Europe, but they just released their first CD in Europe in 2001. A few web sites say that they are due for a massive breakthrough in the U.S. (this CD went up to number three on the Norwegian record charts). It seems doubtful here. With a radio market where smooth jazz has taken over, this CD is too good to fit in. But I hope that the web sites are right.

- Dave Howell

Mea Culpa

They Put You in a Mask

Empty records

www.empty-records.com

This is intelligent, heartfelt hardcore punk with a kick in the ass. The album starts off with a very catchy, well written song called "Waiting for America" that's about the unmet idealism of America.

continued next page

The fourth song, "New Kinda Preppie," is a meaty, riff-heavy song about elitism in "alternative" culture that spawns the lyric: "Well your band sure looks real pretty, but can they make me feel a thing?" The 6th track "Corporate Nation" is a very old-school, heartfelt song about social change that is the first political song to make me really feel something in ages. "1555" is about the personal attachment to a house: "in this basement I look and see heaven behind a bright red light/ angels spread their ugly black wings and dump up to take flight." Another great song, "Massacre High" is a very powerful, catchy, chant likesong about school and violence and society. Overall, my favorite cut is the vocally distorted deathrock/black metal toned "beauty in wrath." Not only are the lyrics brutal, but the music is very original. It's sad that this is the only song in this vein, but the other songs are really cool just the same. All in all, Mea Culpa are a great punk band, and you should definitely check them out.

-Icon

mêlée

Against the Tide

Hopeless Records, 2003

www.HopelessRecords.com

I was very curious about this CD. I had heard good things about mêlée, but I had no idea what they sounded like at all. So as soon as I got this one, I popped it in my CD player and gave it a good listen. While what I got didn't exactly blow me away, it was fun to listen to, which I think was their intention in the first place [their website www.meleerocks.com, may just prove my theory]. This disc is three tracks of keyboard laced emo/pop, sort of along the lines of The Anniversary plus Ozma plus a little bit of Phantom Planet, and one track [the final song, "Routines"] that reminds me more of the music from an anime film. There is also an enhanced CD video of a fifth song, "Francesca," that is probably the best song of the five. All in all, this ep shows that music doesn't have to be groundbreaking or complicated to be good.

-Robbie Annese

Midsummer/Coastal

This Ageless Night

Sun Sea Sky Productions, 2003

www.sunseasky.com

Some bands double-up on a CD because their sounds are similar and they might share a similar audience. In this case, the bands compliment each other well while maintaining their own unique approach.

The first band, Midsummer, stands out with excellent production. The walls of guitars and programming contrast with Dale Bryson's light vocals, which often seem ready to go off key. But Bryson adds a human touch to the layered sounds.

The longer songs are best able to show off the studio work. "Silent Blue" dramatically rises within its four and a quarter minutes, while the instrumental "Japanese Beetle" shows a wealth of imagination, with synthesized sounds that imitate pizzicato violins, small bells, and generally give a classical feel. And at a little over six minutes, "'Til Human Voices Wake Us" is a beautiful psychedelic piece that makes you regret that Midsummer only

has half a CD here.

Coastal is more acoustic-based and does not go in as much for production, even though all three of its members play keyboards along with the usual guitar, bass, and drums. Their first song, "Sunbathers," is a solo piano piece.

The following songs, which vary from two and a half to nine and a quarter minutes, are so quiet they seem like ambient pieces with lyrics. They sustain interest, however, with haunting melodies and subdued backgrounds of keyboards and electric guitars. Coastal may have done well by having five songs, since more might have been repetitious. Here they are great chill-out songs for a memorable CD.

-Dave Howell

Amanda Rogers

The Places You Dwell

Immigrant Sun Records, 2003

www.ImmigrantSun.com

"Wow" is all I could say after listening to this album for a minute or two. The first song, an absolutely beautiful acapella song called "And She Waited," features Amanda harmonizing with herself to create an unforgettable melody. When I got a phone call while listening to it, I picked up and told the person on the other end of the line to listen, then held the phone to the speaker. After it ended, the caller [my friend Kym], said "Oh my god... my jaw just dropped and stayed there. Who was that?" It continues that way through the remaining nine songs, Amanda and her piano weaving melodies, each distinct and different, not losing any impact, just as beautiful as the one preceding it. She goes from whispers to breathtaking full-voice singing, delivering her amazing lyrics. This girl is infinitely talented, and I think you'll hear plenty from her in the future. I'd highly recommend this to ... well, anyone and everyone. Very possibly the album of the year.

-Robbie Annese

Rocky Votolato

Light and Sound EP

Second Nature Recordings, 2003

www.secondnaturerecordings.com

The *Light and Sound* EP is four concise, mostly acoustic pop songs from Waxwing leader Rocky Votolato. The title song is taken from the forthcoming full-length, but the other three are just as worthy of single status. While none are immediate standouts, none are without hooks, glossy and inviting production (thanks to Death Cab for Cutie guitarist Chris Walla, who also plays guitar and bass here), or evocative lyrics. Votolato's ability to elicit sympathy for a narrator who tunelessly proclaims things like "I wanna hit somebody / with a baseball bat. / Break his fucking knees/ and feel good about it" could recall Elliott Smith or Jim O'Rourke's *Halfway to a Threeway*. However, Votolato's lyrics and somewhat raspy vocals carve out a space of their own after a few listens. This is a dark, but not melodramatic, EP which achieves an impressive creative range from roughly the same musical approach for each song. At times the immediacy of Votolato's voice and words shows him flirting with the breaking point of sincerity, but he always avoids self-indulgence. Overall, this release is surprisingly

substantial for non-full-length material.

-Luke Bradley

Various Artists

Lookout Records Punk Seven Inch CD Vol. 1, 1988-1989

Lookout Records, 2003

www.LookoutRecords.com

This, as you may have guessed, is a CD compilation of six early seven inches on Lookout Records, digitally remastered, with all the original artwork from each ep making up the booklet of the CD. What you may not have guessed is that there is a lot of diversity between the bands featured. Corrupted Morals starts it off with their *Chef* EP, five tracks of old style political hardcore that still sounds great to this day, even with the Ronald Reagan and Edwin Meese references. Next up is Isocracy, a band that included future Samiam singer Jason Beebout, and their "Bedtime for Isocracy" EP — 10 tracks of kids joking around with instruments basically. Then comes Plaid Retina's self-titled EP. These guys are seriously the fastest band ever, or at least tied with Anal Cunt. They tear through 12 tracks in a matter of a few minutes. Awesome. After that whirlwind barrage of thrash come the Yeastie Girlz, and their *Ovary Action* EP. Ten tracks of all-girl acapella rap about things like condoms, guys with sperm for brains, etc. Fifth on the list is the Surrogate Brains' *Surrogate Serenades* EP. It's six tracks of the kind of pop-punk we've all come to know Lookout for. Last but not least is Kamala & the Carnivores' "Girl Band" ep. Four more tracks of pop-punk, by a girl band this time. Guest appearance on bass by Matt Freeman of Rancid fame. All in all a fun collection, with more than a few gems.

-Robbie Annese

Various Artists

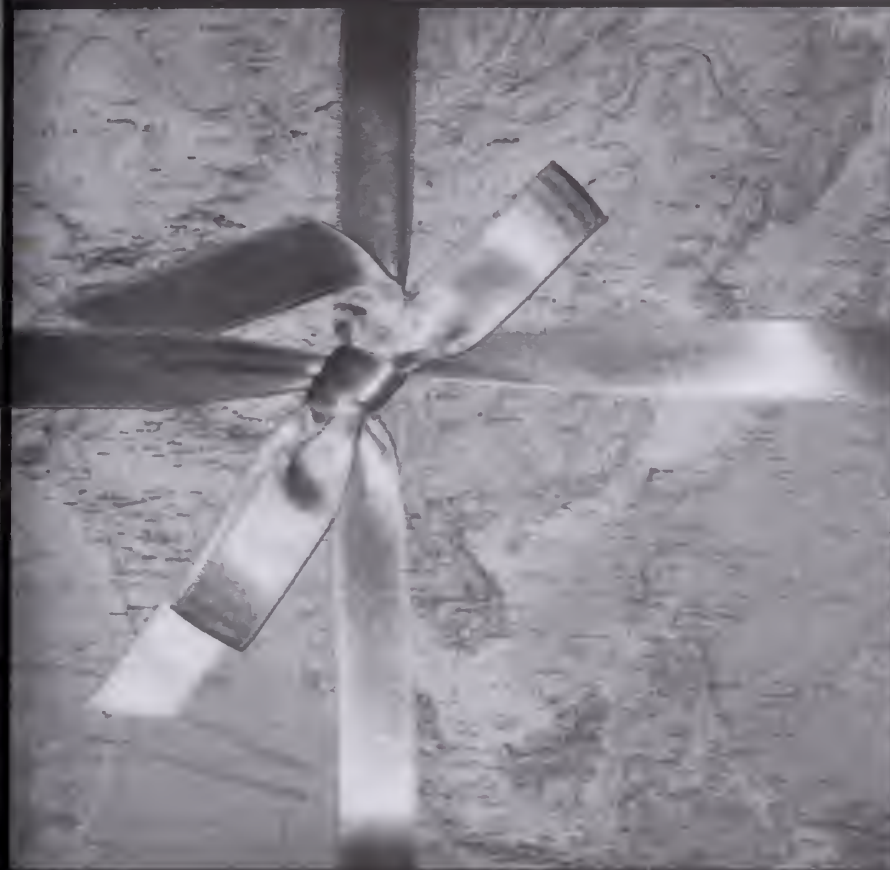
Cinema Beer Buddy DVD

Hopeless Records, 2003

www.HopelessRecords.com

This, the fifth installment in Hopeless Records' "Cinema Beer" series of videos, contains a little something for everyone, from the metalcore of bands like Poison The Well and Shadows Fall to emo-popsters Taking Back Sunday and Jimmy Eat World. A number of the videos were surprisingly well done, especially comparing them to the videos on earlier "Cinema Beer" titles. The winners of the bunch have to be AFI's "Days of the Phoenix" video [Davey is dressed exactly like Edward Scissorhands, you can't beat that!], The Lawrence Arms' "Porno and Snuff Films" [I challenge you to find me a music video this funny anywhere], and Taking Back Sunday's "Cute Without the 'E' (Cut From the Team)," even if it is a bit violent. Bonus Footage including a live Shadows Fall performance, Midtown dressing up in sheets and doing somersaults, and the making of Poison The Well's "Botchla" video make this DVD even cooler. Anyone into punk/emo/metalcore/whatever will definitely be happy with this.

-Robbie Annese



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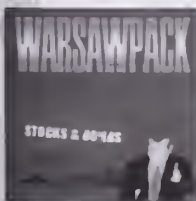
BEAUTY PILL

WARSAWPACK

Stocks & Bombs

August 19, 2003

*"Every now and then a band comes along that breaks barriers, crosses genres and blows the music formula out of the water. Warsawpack is set on bringing both a musical and political revolution to the forefront. Welcome to the next generation of indie music."
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Tackling

Freedom is not something that happens one day.

It is what is happening everyday as you're working towards it.

"What is freedom?" I asked, taking in a deep breath.

"Baby, freedom is you," Emilio answered, trying to make up for what he had just said. He spoke in that soft way that always made me melt. But I was too hurt to be tickled by it. Not in the two years we'd been friends nor the three months we'd been dating had I felt so broken. I lay naked under the sheets, my body curled up into a ball in the corner of his bed. I wanted to cry but even my tears had gone numb.

"If I were freedom, this would not be happening," I thought to myself. It was my fault. I had broken the Golden Rule: never mention love or commitment during or after sex. What's more, we weren't going to have the "M" conversation again for at least three months. But since our last talk, when I had said that I wasn't ready for Monogamy, we have become closer than ever. Last week, I even picked his nose for the first time.

And tonight was an exception to the rule. This evening, as the sun was setting behind Santa Monica's mountains and L.A.'s skyscrapers began to illuminate the night sky, George W. declared war on Iraq. I was stuck in traffic on the 101 blasting Paulina Rubio's "Yo No Soy Esa Mujer," singing my heart out. Luckily, my cell phone lit up when Miriam called, otherwise I wouldn't have heard it.

"Are you listening?" she asked quietly. She'd been upset a lot this week with the impending war, so the tremble in her voice didn't jolt me.

"To what?" I answered naively.

"To KPFK. They're broadcasting Bush's speech," she said patiently. Miriam was always so tolerant of me when I "retrieved" from society. With Emilio on my mind, I had forgotten the 48 hours were up. Miriam, older and wiser than me, would never forget. Perhaps being the daughter of Holocaust survivors did that to a person.

My stomach dropped. I turned off the music and gripped the steering wheel. My eyes spotted the county jail which stood in the distance. The white paint got dirtier every

year with the exhaust from the freeway. The building had no windows. "At least I'm free to see the sky," I always thought as I drove by. But liberty must encompass so much more than that. Toni Morrison said the purpose of freedom is to free others. This was the best definition I could find. When I asked people what freedom was, most said they didn't know. I couldn't understand this, given how much time we spend fighting for it.

I'd been listening to the news and studying articles in the papers. I even had numerous arguments with my father about it after dinner over Turkish coffee. Still, I just couldn't accept that this military operation would liberate anyone, least of all the Iraqi people. I really believed the millions of us from Cairo to Covina who marched against this war would succeed in stopping it. But, we hadn't. George "Dubya" Bush had just said so. A picture of graffiti art painted on a wall in Barcelona came to mind. It read, "Leaders who don't listen to the majority are dictators." The thought gave me goose bumps. "Pay attention as an act of resistance," Miriam told me before we hung up.

Immediately afterward, Emilio called. I answered the phone without saying hello. "How free am I if I can't stop a war waged in my name and with my money?" I asked. He wasn't surprised. These kinds of discussions had always been at the heart of our relationship, even when we were "just friends." Since we'd become lovers they'd heated up, and only after hours of debating how to create a just world while sipping hot tea on his floor would I brush my lips across his neck, my tongue savoring the taste of salt on his skin. We'd explore each other's bodies until the lines between us dissolved.

He interrupted my daydream with an answer to my question. "You are freedom, Stephanie." He said my name the way I imagined my Syrian great-grandmother would have said it, her Arabic tongue pronouncing every syllable delicately as if savoring the richness of dark chocolate.

"And also," he continued, "freedom is

not something that happens one day. It is what is happening everyday as you're working towards it." The little things had me falling in love with this man. He sighed. "Can you come over?"

It wasn't long after he'd opened the door that I tackled and undressed him. Tonight, as the bombs exploded, I wanted nothing else than to crawl into Emilio's arms. I was determined to feel safe, if even for a fleeting moment. I hoped that if we held each other close enough and stripped down so that even our naked bodies bore no mask, then maybe, just maybe, we could make the madness go away.

I didn't agree with the Lysistrata Project, which had staged several hundred readings of Aristophanes' play "Lysistrata," in all 50 states and nearly 60 other countries. The Greek comedy, named after the lead character, told the story of women who campaigned to withhold sex from their husbands until they put a stop to the Peloponnesian War. The project started this winter as a means to prevent war on Iraq. But sexuality is not a woman's only source of power or the only manner in which we can influence international politics. Besides, men are not the only ones who need and enjoy sex.

As an act of resistance, I planned on celebrating the erotic more than ever, to the point of indulgence. When I told Emilio, his response was, "I'm always down for resistance." In spite of all the destruction taking place around us, the fact that new life could be brought forth from our union gave me great hope. Not that I was ready to conceive or that he would enter me without a condom.

After our bodies collapsed, sweaty and tired, we lay close to each other in the shadows of his room. The flame from the candle on his desk flickered. It was then I started the forbidden dialogue.

"Maybe the world will be OK," I said snuggling up to him.

"Maybe we're here right now," he replied simply. Damn it. He wouldn't accept my romantic escapism. No matter how much

free

INDEX

Can Men Take Feminism to Bed?

words **Gabriel Constans** illustration **Melly Curphy**



Until I read bell hooks' (she spells her name without caps) recent book on feminism and love, *Communion: The Female Search for Love*, I would have sworn that I supported women's (and men's) liberation in every aspect of my life. But after the first few chapters, I became painfully aware of the fact that I haven't applied the same understanding and equality I try to faithfully practice at work, with friends, raising children, and doing household chores to my sexual romantic life.

In *Communion*, Ms. hooks says, "Some men cared enough to consent to feminist thinking and to change. But only a very, very few loved us — loved us all the way. And that meant respecting our sexual rights."

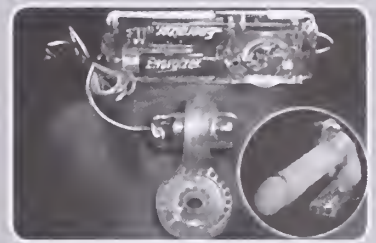
I always think of my partner's pleasure and satisfaction during sex and am turned on by her joy as much or more than my own sensations. However, I also see how I have used coercion, control, emotional distancing, and blame to get what I wanted. I continually gave her the message (unconsciously and nonverbally) that she was never "good enough." I always wanted her to be more sexual more often with greater variety and to be different than she was or is, in order to fulfill my desires, perceived needs, and fantasies. The underlying implications were "if you don't change or be more like I want you to be, I'll have to leave and find someone else." It created a sense of fear and rejection.

Seeing this reality shattered my self-image of always being a loving, caring man and helped me acknowledge how often I, and the continually reinforced messages from society, have caused such intense and long-lasting loneliness for those women seeking loving, shared partnerships with men. hooks states, "Feminist silence about love reflects a collective sorrow about our powerlessness to free all men from the hold patriarchy has on their minds and hearts. Our heartache came from facing the reality that if men were not willing to holistically embrace feminist revolution, then they would not be in an emotional place where they could offer us love."

I am beginning to realize that it is love and connection I desire most, not sex. I no longer need sex to reassure me that I am loved or wanted. In the past, having someone desire and want me sexually meant they loved me. If they didn't have sex as often as I wanted, I reacted out of fear and sadness believing it meant they didn't love me completely. Out of this sadness, I would react with frustration and anger by trying to get them to "prove" their love for me with sex or by emotionally distancing myself and not talking in order to "protect" myself from having expectations or "being hurt."

My reactions, and I believe those of most men, are not realities I have totally ignored. But, until reading

Diamond Ring Vibe
Toys in Babeland
www.babeland.com
\$25.00



Communion, I hadn't really taken them to heart and honestly confronted my own patriarchal fears and thinking in the matter of love and relationships. It felt like Ms. hooks had me in her sights when she said, "Feminist women stopped talking about love because we found that love was harder to get than power. Men, and patriarchal females, were more willing to give us jobs, power, or money than they were to give us love. Women who learn to love represent the greatest threat to the patriarchal status quo."

While reading *Communion*, some kind of switch went on in my head. At first, it opened the floodgates of grief over my part in perpetuating such profound alienation and pain. Then, a kind of peace engulfed me in a newfound love and acceptance of myself and my partner. I am less stressed and anxious about the future and don't try to make people be different than who they are. Is it any surprise that my partner has also experienced more peace with herself and in bed? She no longer has to worry or wonder if she will ever "be enough" or meet my suffocating patriarchal images of how she "should" be.

As I learn to love, without depending on her to fulfill or "make" that love, she too is finding that our mutual appreciation and respect for what is present, rather than what is absent, has deepened every aspect of our lives. Neither of us need the other person's "approval" to love or be loved.

Ms. hooks insightfully reminds her readers that, "Knowing that both women and men are socialized to accept patriarchal thinking should make it clear to everyone that men are not the problem. The problem is patriarchy." The problem is our refusal to acknowledge our own behavior in the most intimate moments of our lives and the fear of real connection and closeness that keeps us perpetuating the myths and lies about the minor differences of genes, gender, and genetics. ★

When my partner and I first took the Diamond Ring Vibe out of the wrapper, we squinted at it. "Where does that go?" she asked. Then we figured out how the stretchy cockring slides down around the base of the penis, holding the bullet vibrator in place right where the clitoris is during intercourse. We smiled. Now we swear by it.

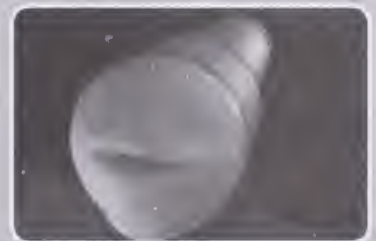
On its own, it's an effective clitoral or penile stimulator. At the base of the penis with the vibrator turned on, the slightest touch anywhere along the shaft feels like a million soft tapping fingers (even if they're your own). You can imagine how it feels to add a tongue or the inside of a mouth to the mix.

As long as it's around the penis, it's great for the guy, and it also offers a great feeling to anyone else within rubbing distance. This toy is really at peak effectiveness in the missionary position, where the crotch gets close to the clitoris. For any woman who enjoys clitoral stimulation during intercourse, this more than gets the job done while keeping your hands and mind free for other pursuits.

The wired control, usually a pet peeve of mine, didn't get in the way very much, though whoever was holding it would occasionally — and very unexpectedly — yank the bullet out of its holder. Users also need to keep in mind that the cockring is soft rubber that cannot be sterilized, so this toy should only be used with a single partner. But at just \$25.00 from Toys in Babeland, you could consider investing in a different one for each person in your life.

-Luckey Haskins

The Fleshlight
Toys in Babeland
www.babeland.com
\$63.00



As a boy, I'm kinda jealous that we don't have something as efficient as vibrators to get off on by ourselves. Sure, I've got a couple vibrators that I use for a variety of orgasm-enhancing purposes, but none of them are the stand-alone toys that I can turn to for a quick, intense orgasm. Even still, I've always been curious about what I'll call the "s(t)imulation" toys that are supposed to resemble a vagina or a mouth — most of which have ridiculous names like "pocket pussy" so I've never really been too interested. While the Fleshlight doesn't exactly break out of the silly name mold, it certainly revolutionizes the boy toy field by offering a masturbation toy that is as close to unprotected vaginal sex as I've experienced.

The Fleshlight gets its name from the fact that it's shaped like a large plastic flashlight with a cap that screws off to reveal the toy's essence — a cyberskin mouth that leads to a sleeve housed in the flashlight's shaft. Cyberskin is a revolutionary material that feels like silky skin when it's dry and like slick, hot flesh when a little lubrication and friction are applied. I'm not sure if this was an intended feature of the toy, but there is also another removable cap on the opposite end of the Fleshlight. Most likely this was made for easy cleaning, but I've found that you can adjust the suction of the Fleshlight by tightening or loosening the alternate cap.

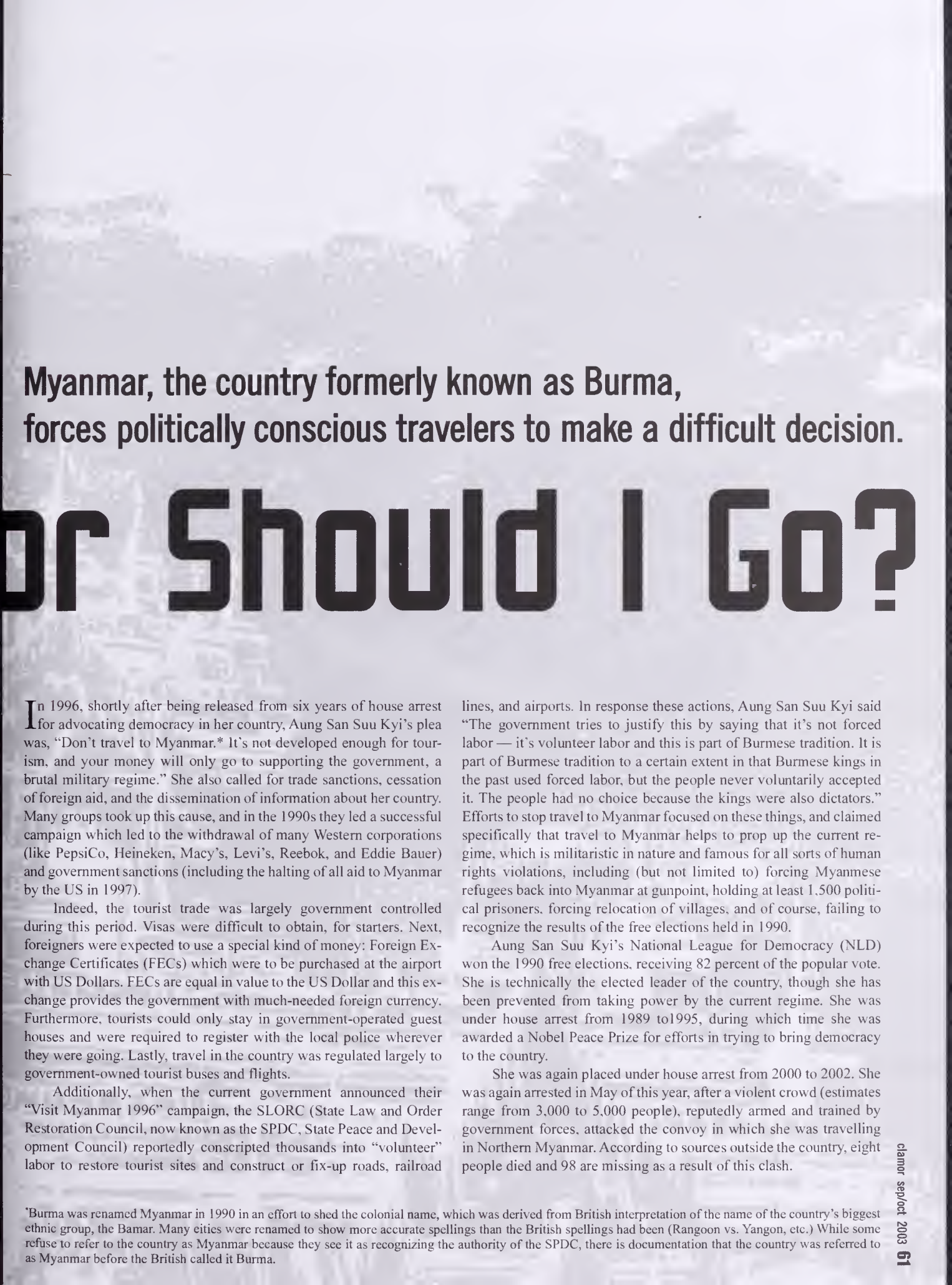
Like a best friend, my new favorite sex toy isn't without its flaws. I'm more than a little uncomfortable with the disembodied mouth design of the Fleshlight. Our society does more than its share of work to objectify women and reduce them to lips, tits, or ass, and I'm not too crazy about my sex toys carrying that torch. I must admit, though, that I didn't realize that it was supposed to be a mouth, as I'd been using it with the lips vertically-oriented so it looked more like an anatomically-incorrect vagina. I'm not sure why this makes it less problematic, but it seemed more like the inverse of a dildo that way. The other issue with the Fleshlight is that it can be messy as hell if you're gettin' into it. A combination of lube and cum will be chillin' inside the Fleshlight (and possibly all over you) when you're done if you've used it right. My suggestion: this toy is great for pre-shower masturbation where clean-up can be quick and thorough.

Now, I'm not typically the kind of person who has the disposable income to be able to drop \$63 on a sex toy, but this is certainly something I would budget for. Skip a couple of shows at the megaplex or drink some cheap beer for awhile instead of your favorite import and splurge on a toy that I promise will change the way you masturbate.

-Lucas Wood

Should I Stay

words and photos Danee Voorhees



Myanmar, the country formerly known as Burma,
forces politically conscious travelers to make a difficult decision.

or Should I Go?

In 1996, shortly after being released from six years of house arrest for advocating democracy in her country, Aung San Suu Kyi's plea was, "Don't travel to Myanmar.* It's not developed enough for tourism, and your money will only go to supporting the government, a brutal military regime." She also called for trade sanctions, cessation of foreign aid, and the dissemination of information about her country. Many groups took up this cause, and in the 1990s they led a successful campaign which led to the withdrawal of many Western corporations (like PepsiCo, Heineken, Macy's, Levi's, Reebok, and Eddie Bauer) and government sanctions (including the halting of all aid to Myanmar by the US in 1997).

Indeed, the tourist trade was largely government controlled during this period. Visas were difficult to obtain, for starters. Next, foreigners were expected to use a special kind of money: Foreign Exchange Certificates (FECs) which were to be purchased at the airport with US Dollars. FECs are equal in value to the US Dollar and this exchange provides the government with much-needed foreign currency. Furthermore, tourists could only stay in government-operated guest houses and were required to register with the local police wherever they were going. Lastly, travel in the country was regulated largely to government-owned tourist buses and flights.

Additionally, when the current government announced their "Visit Myanmar 1996" campaign, the SLORC (State Law and Order Restoration Council, now known as the SPDC, State Peace and Development Council) reportedly conscripted thousands into "volunteer" labor to restore tourist sites and construct or fix-up roads, railroad

lines, and airports. In response these actions, Aung San Suu Kyi said "The government tries to justify this by saying that it's not forced labor — it's volunteer labor and this is part of Burmese tradition. It is part of Burmese tradition to a certain extent in that Burmese kings in the past used forced labor, but the people never voluntarily accepted it. The people had no choice because the kings were also dictators." Efforts to stop travel to Myanmar focused on these things, and claimed specifically that travel to Myanmar helps to prop up the current regime, which is militaristic in nature and famous for all sorts of human rights violations, including (but not limited to) forcing Myanmar refugees back into Myanmar at gunpoint, holding at least 1,500 political prisoners, forcing relocation of villages, and of course, failing to recognize the results of the free elections held in 1990.

Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) won the 1990 free elections, receiving 82 percent of the popular vote. She is technically the elected leader of the country, though she has been prevented from taking power by the current regime. She was under house arrest from 1989 to 1995, during which time she was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize for efforts in trying to bring democracy to the country.

She was again placed under house arrest from 2000 to 2002. She was again arrested in May of this year, after a violent crowd (estimates range from 3,000 to 5,000 people), reputedly armed and trained by government forces, attacked the convoy in which she was travelling in Northern Myanmar. According to sources outside the country, eight people died and 98 are missing as a result of this clash.

*Burma was renamed Myanmar in 1990 in an effort to shed the colonial name, which was derived from British interpretation of the name of the country's biggest ethnic group, the Bamar. Many cities were renamed to show more accurate spellings than the British spellings had been (Rangoon vs. Yangon, etc.) While some refuse to refer to the country as Myanmar because they see it as recognizing the authority of the SPDC, there is documentation that the country was referred to as Myanmar before the British called it Burma.

Aung San Suu Kyi, or "The Lady" as she is popularly known, was put into what the junta told foreign press was "protective custody." Meanwhile, within the country, it is reported that she has been detained because the NLD "breached agreements with the government concerning the party's organizational activities during the trip." According to U Tin Winn, the Labor Minister for the SPDC, they failed to obey traffic regulations and were not to hold large gatherings, implying that the NLD had organized the group which attacked their motorcade.

Win Aung, the Foreign Minister of the SPDC, also told the foreign press that Myanmar was like an ICU patient who had just come out of the hospital and doesn't want to return, referring specifically to the 1988 anti-government uprisings. The Deputy Foreign Minister claimed that the NLD was "engaging in a manner resembling the days of anarchy in 1988."

With statements made at a meeting of ASEAN in mid-June of this year that the SPDC would release Suu Kyi soon, I headed into Myanmar with the intention of being there when the release occurred. Some thought she might be released on her birthday, June 19.

Having now traveled through the countryside, I understand he meant the Myanmar "soon": as soon as they damn well feel like it, or get around to it, or when they're finished eating. It was the soon used by Lieutenant General Tun Kyi, who said in 1994 that as soon as the constitution is completed (which the SLORC declared must be in place before the officials elected in 1990 could take office), democracy will be restored. In 1962, when the military took over the civilian government, they sealed off the country's borders entirely. Declaring the "Burmese road to socialism," the military regime took over the economy and brought it down to the retail level.

Though foreigners were allowed in again in the 1980s under heavy restriction, Myanmar remains largely closed off from the outside world. This is particularly related to the flow of information into and within the country. Legal use of the Internet is limited to the government, a few large businesses, and tourist offices. Additionally, the Department of Press Scrutiny screens all books before allowing their production and sale. In 2002, 8,700 books were approved for publication, the most popular being works that "raise the morals of youth." Also, no travel guides for countries other than Myanmar are available. Even the library at the British Council contains only a sparse travel section, with nothing but anecdotal literature on travels and exploits during the era of the British Empire.

The newspaper's front cover reminds readers of the basic tenets of the society, including: Anyone who is riotous or destructive and unruly is our enemy; Oppose those trying to jeopardize the stability of the state; Crush all internal and external elements as the common enemy; and Only when there is discipline will there be progress. Sign-

boards with similar slogans could be seen posted about the center of Yangon as well. Not that this newspaper reporting can matter so much; the US government estimates the functional literacy rate in Myanmar is about 30 percent of the population. It doesn't help that the government closes schools and universities on a whim for long stretches of time on a regular basis. Following the detainment of Suu Kyi, the universities were closed again. The newspaper did discuss how busy the garment industry, Myanmar's biggest exporting industry, had been recently, noting that there was more work than the ability to fill orders. Garment factories receive up to \$1 for each item of apparel they supply to wholesalers, and exported nearly \$400 million (USD) worth of garments in 2002 to American and European markets. And with good reason: the variable costs of production in Myanmar, namely labor, are the lowest by far in all of Asia. Differing estimates put wages at

between \$.04 per hour and \$.16 per day.

There was a certain bittersweet intensity to the people I met in Myanmar, coupled with a heartbreaking desperation. They wanted to know about the outside world, discuss the events in their country and what news I had about Suu Kyi. They took me into their homes, fed me, painted my face with thanaka (traditional make-up, worn by both



U Than, here in traditional checked Longyi dress, looks over old Bagan. "The only hope for young men in these villages is to become tour guides," he said.

men and women, made by grinding tree bark into a paste), showed me their villages, kilns, temples, peanut fields, and practiced their English with me. Everywhere I went, young people said their biggest dream is becoming a tour guide for foreigners. It is their best opportunity to make any sort of money. I found the people in Myanmar to be the most hospitable, kind, and curious bunch of "Hotel California" lovers I had ever met. If only the Eagles knew.

For many, their devout faith keeps them going. Indeed, some of the most beautiful and elaborate Buddhist shrines in the world can be found in Myanmar. The ancient city of Bagan, whose 2,330 temples and shrines peeking out of the bush were built mainly in the 11th century, is a glorious site covering nearly 16 square miles. A ride around this area on a bicycle or horse cart reveals people tending their goats, cows, and sesame fields. Signs remind you to "love animals, not eat them." A magic and sweetness pervades this area, as people go about their daily lives in this spectacular setting. Shwedagon Pagoda, in Yangon, is another amazing holy site, having been built and built upon for centuries (archaeologists suggest that building began between the 6th and 10th centuries). Some four tons of gold and thousands of diamonds and rubies cover its 322-foot tall stupa. The shrines and buildings that encase the pagoda are filled with devout worshippers and monsoon nappers, waiting for the rain to stop. It is considered the most sacred of all Buddhist sites in Myanmar, due to the eight hairs of the Buddha which, goes the legend, are encased inside the stupa. A serious religiosity pervades here, though you will find the monks smoking

cigarettes and flirting with pretty girls as they pace in prayer. All men are expected to spend some time as monks in the country.

So back to the question, should the politically inclined boycott Myanmar as a travel destination? Travel today in Myanmar is markedly different than in 1996. The government has relaxed its regulations on guest houses and inland travel, which means it is possible to stay at private guest houses and travel on private bus, train, and plane routes. Though some sources claim that many "private" guest houses and tour outfits are actually business fronts for the government's illicit opium trade in the "Golden Triangle" (which stretches into Laos and Thailand), it seems that the majority of small, mom-and-pop type businesses are legitimately helping local communities. In areas such as Bagan, these businesses provide locals with most of their income. Additionally, it is fairly easy to keep your money out of the hands of the government, though a small amount may get in. At the airport, when you are asked to exchange \$200 for FECs, a small present will get you out of having to purchase any FECs at all. The few questionable places where money could end up in the hands of the government, such as the airport tax and admission into Bagan, are negligible amounts. Foreigners do pay at least five times more for most things than the locals do, so travelers should plan accordingly.

Travel sanctions are a questionable way of punishing the government of Myanmar. The people of this country have been closed off from the outside world for so long, to close it off further is only detrimental to them. Tourism does bring much needed income into many areas, in a country without many options. A much more effective approach to putting pressure on the SPDC would include pressuring China (its main military supporter) and Japan (its main foreign aid contributor) to curb their support of such a repressive regime. It means not purchasing clothing made in Myanmar, and publicly boycotting companies that use the country as a manufacturing base. In fact, travel in the country could actually be beneficial to democracy in Myanmar. If more people went there and came home to tell the story, more information would get about this government and its abuses. Be warned though, that if you travel to Myanmar, you will be detained. You will be questioned. You will have government escorts show you the "sights" and want to know about your intentions and activities. Your bus will be stopped every 20

miles at checkpoints by men with large guns. You will be required to show your passport many times a day. But, if there was ever a place in which excellent grassroots humanitarian work could be done, this would be it. Looking to "travel with a conscience"? There is a wealth of opportunity here for the independent traveler. Villages need books, paper, pens, dictionaries, and medicine. They will welcome you with open arms and food. They need people to volunteer as teachers, doctors, documentarians, and literacy volunteers. They need to tell their stories and their stories need to get out of the country.

Should you go, there are a few things to take into consideration. Medical facilities are below substandard and should you become seriously ill, you will have a difficult time getting any sort of treatment. In many areas there is malaria, tuberculosis, and other highly infectious diseases. When applying for a visa, do not under any circumstances claim to be a journalist, writer, or photographer. Also, you should be very conscious about promoting democracy or government regime change — don't go handing out leaflets or radical literature. Unless, of course, you want a cell next door to Suu Kyi.

FURTHER READING

For more information on boycott Myanmar campaigns, please see:
<http://www.burmacampaign.org.uk>
<http://www.freeburmacoalition.org>

To read the text of the "Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act," passed by the Senate 97-1 (with Michael Enzi, R-WY, voting against) on June 11.
<http://usinfo.state.gov/regional/ea/burma/s1215go.htm>

To see other statements made by the US government on the situation in Myanmar (interesting!!) see:
<http://usinfo.state.gov/regional/ea/burma/homepage.htm>

For an interesting read and a government propaganda fix, check out THE TRUTH, the SPDC's analyses of NLD announcements:
<http://www.myanmar-information.net/truth/truth.html>

REVIEW ROAD READING

In Search of the World: A Traveller's Almanac: Volume One

Edited by IvoryBell
www.ivorybell.com

This conveniently pocket-sized book (presumably so you can take it with you on the road) is trying to approach the subject of traveling from a variety of angles. Published with the help of the CrimethInc. folks, it is full of inspiring anecdotes and short-stories that are written by various famous and infamous historical figures, such as French poet Arthur Rimbaud and anarchist Hakim Bey.

The common themes of all essays are drifting and aimless wandering. "We wander because no nation, no ideology, no culture, no religion, no philosophy holds our loyalty or pins us down in time or place." Throughout the book, the British spelling of "traveller" is used because of its association with Gypsies ("Our sympathies are extended to them and nomads everywhere who resist 'settlement'.") Emphasis is placed on the journey rather than the destination. In doing so, *In Search of the World* rejects traditional travel and guidebooks, which, it says, stand in the way of real experience. Discovering the world for and by yourself is infinitely more exciting and rewarding.

Traveling in its most basic sense then is the exploration of space — both outer and inner. "It's been more like traveling within myself," says a postcard reprinted in the book, "a process of internal exploration and construction, with the world around me providing a foundation and inspiration on which to build." The

book at times falls into the trap of placing too much emphasis on the individual. It does not, for example, discuss travel as a form of nurturing cross-cultural understanding. Claiming that "life on the open road is the essence of freedom," the book is frighteningly in line with the all-American ideal of rugged individualism. In a way, permanent travel is anti-social. It is impossible to build healthy communities and stable, meaningful relationships when you are constantly on the run. Maybe staying stationary will make you want to change the world around you more.



The book views traveling as a mindset rather than an actual physical pastime. In order to travel you do not need to put thousands of miles behind you, all you need to do is to step out of your home with a curious and open mind. Henry David Thoreau sums it up: "Two or three hours walking will carry me to as strange a country as I expect ever to see."

Continuously arguing against getting stuck in habits and routines, *In Search of the World* asserts that space is really what you make of it. Our every-day environments may often be seen as oppressive and boring, since all spaces already have a fixed meaning prescribed to it. To liberate and reclaim this space we need to break with these strict designations. Just as a supermarket can be a labyrinth to a playing child, the sidewalks can be empty canvasses to a stencil-graffiti artist. The possibilities are endless.

-David Mois!

In Search of the World is available from www.ivorybell.com, www.akpress.org, or by sending \$6 to PO Box 1081, Carrboro, NC 27510



In a world that is increasingly less receptive to political music, nothing could be more refreshing than hearing the radically charged songs of David Rovics. His music and message are intelligent, accessible, clever, and beautiful: the perfect combination to bridge the ever growing gap between academic politics and recreation. He has played all over Europe, South America, and North America, to audiences ranging from 25 people in a union hall to 500,000 at an anti-war demonstration.

Clamor: So what things aside from music do you do?

David Rovics: I'm really a professional truck driver. I just drive this truck all over the place, and then I stop places and play music for a little while, and then keep on driving.

Really?

[laughs] Yeah, except the only thing I'm transporting is myself and my sound system. I mean, that's the way it feels. I drive a lot. I book gigs, so I spend a lot of time staring at the computer, and trying to organize my next few months. These things are very time consuming.

I really like to travel to places where I don't have gigs, and see what's happening in those places, and to read books, and to write songs. I'm pretty obsessed, and pretty much everything I do circles around performing, and songs, and the activist movement, and seeing what's happening. But I don't do any kind of organizing or anything. The only thing I do is sing songs, and other things that are related to that, like writing songs.

So when you're writing songs, do you usually follow a specific formula, or do things just come to you?

It's really a process of trying to keep that part of the brain stimulated as much as possible. And so part of it, is thinking. Okay, here's something I want to write a song about, now how would I do that? Or something I want to write a song about, but I know I'll need more information about, so I'll read a book or some magazine articles on that subject, or visit somewhere related to it. But then, a lot of times the songs I write have nothing to do with those books, or the attempts. A lot of times something will just occur to me to, that may be about a subject that I've already written about several times, but it's like a new angle to write about it.

Yeah, I've noticed that some of your songs do seem well researched. You couldn't very well just think "Well I'm going to write a song about the Irish immigrants who fought for the Mexican Government during the Imperialist, Mexican American War."

Well yeah, for that song I was listening to a lecture by Howard Zinn, and he mentioned the St. Patrick Battalion. The way he mentioned it, it immediately occurred to me what a great song that would be. The chorus "We formed the St. Patrick's Battalion and we fought on the Mexican side" which is just simply stating what happened. And then the verses just kind of flushed out. But for something like "Who Will Tell The People" I don't know if that seems well researched, but I just had the idea of doing a song on what the media doesn't tell us. I knew about Project Censored and their top ten, or

David Rovics
is **Rousing**

top 25 most censored stories of the year, so I went to their website, and they basically wrote the song for me.

Okay, the next question... well I guess it's kind of two questions, and you can pick which one you want to answer. The first is: Would you say that music is the best way to reach people outside the movement, or is it just a way to speak to those already in the movement? And then the "or" question is Do you think art and music are effective methods of resistance, or ways to inspire people within the intellectual ghettos?

I'd say all of the above to both questions, really. I think music is an important way to inspire the troops, and to help us feel like we're in a community. Along with friendship, and food, and hanging out, you know, just being people in our society, and not being atomized, depressed, suburban dwellers... but to actually have a community, and music is a part of us. We're very musical creatures. Music is a part of our lives, all around the world, and it forever has been. Since our hearts started beating we've had rhythm, and since we started talking we were singing. So I think in society in general it plays a profound role, and the same role it has to inspire the troops — literally, the military — they sing songs, you know. The role it plays in the military is the same role it plays in rebel movements or in non-violent resistance, or whatever. It always has that role, and can be used for good or bad. Like anything, I think there are things about music that are inherently good. If there is something inherently good about music, I think it's that sense of community and togetherness that it tends to somehow foster. But that can also be transferred into nationalistic, sort of tribalistic aggression, or it can be a positive, resistance based community. So that's one angle that music has. I think it also has the ability to reach out to communities that might not be interested in listening to the message if it were presented in a more intellectual way or in a lecture. In a song it can just get under their skin. They can just hear it because it's music, and at the end they can just say "Wow I really got into that story, and it made me think about things in a different way." On the relatively few occasions that I've managed to play for the actual public, outside of the activist ghetto, I get that response a lot. People are like "wow, I never thought about the possibility that there were firefighters in Afghanistan, or PEOPLE

in Afghanistan, other than Omar and Bin Laden."

So as a musician, if the revolution... you know, the elusive revolution, were to come tomorrow, and everything was dandy, and we lived in an egalitarian society where everyone was brothers and sisters, what would you sing about?

Oh, well I mean gosh. On the one hand it seems so impossible to imagine, but on the other it's a really provocative question, because I think about it a lot. You know, if everything were really just wonderful in society then where would my values be at? Not just in terms of songwriting, but what I'm doing with my life. Would I feel like it's worth while to spend so much time on the road, driving, lonely, whatever the down sides of it are, you know? Because definitely, when I justify living that way, it isn't just because I feel like I wanna be a musician, it's because I feel like I wanna get the music out there. But, there's always gonna be contradictions within society. I think regardless of how many of the major contradictions have dissolved, there's always gonna be contradictions that maybe are secondary or just completely unimportant to us today. Those will become important contradictions tomorrow.

Do you have any interest in expanding your audience through mainstream media? If a record company told you that they could get all your songs on the radio, would you be interested in using their medium?

Probably I would, but I'd do it in a completely cynical way, knowing that they'd probably drop me, and knowing that whatever fame I might achieve through them would be temporary. And then of course the idea is preposterous anyway, because there are no topical songwriters that write with the kind of bluntness that I write with, who are on mainstream labels. And any body who has that kind of fame: people like Bruce Springsteen and Steve Earl, but I'd say they're really exceptions, because they didn't start out as political songwriters. They were able to do that because of the fame they had. And they're political stuff is not nearly as promoted by their labels as the other stuff is.

In your songs, it's obvious that you're on the left, but are there any particular ideologies that you subscribe to?

Well, I think that so much of what needs to happen today, is that we need to have a progressive movement. What brand of left it is, I think in our situation today, is not terribly important. But once the movement grows, and becomes a real powerful force in society, then I think it will become a lot more important. So in terms of what I write about, and what I think is important to focus on, I don't claim to focus on a real particular political perspective. More to say that resistance is a good thing, and that the system is fucked up, and that people need to understand that, and figure out what we're gonna do about it. But ideologically, and in terms of how I would envision a new society, and resistance to this society... I tend to avoid words like socialist or anarchist, because both of them have been so bastardized that you have to define them before you use them. And that's okay, it's okay for people to call themselves one or the other, and to put out their definition of that, but I think it can also pigeonhole you, or marginalize you.

Do people ever come up to you, and request that you write a song specifically for them? Have you ever written a song from request?

Yeah, it happens fairly often, that people suggest topics for songs. And I appreciate that very much, even if I don't get around to writing a song about the subject, or if I can't figure out a good hook line, I think it's great. So much of songwriting is thinking of something to write about. How you want to address the subject, that's the hook line, and that's really essential. It's what you're basically trying to say in a song, that's really the hook or the chorus, and I kind of end up with that, and then I build the song around that. And sometimes I end up taking out the hook, and have the song without a chorus. And other times I keep the chorus. To me, that's 90% of songwriting. And that's not to say that somebody else could write a song just because they have a good hook line, but it feels like the big, BIG thing, is having the topic to write about, and the hook line. The rest of it can just fall into place. ★

You can purchase Rovics' music from his website at www.davidrovics.com. He also has a full-length release due out in Fall 2003 on Ever Reviled Records (www.everreviledrecords.com)

An extended version of this interview can be read online at www.clamormagazine.org

words Joel Hanson
illustration David Pauls

overheard in a youth hostel

Toji-an Guesthouse. 3 a.m. Kyoto. April 29

The sheets of my bunk bed are a twisted mess at my feet. I think I've been rolling around on this mattress for at least two hours, clinging to my tiny pillow like a life jacket, unable to let go of it and drown pleasantly in the warm waters of sound sleep. The long, narrow room lined with two-tiered bunks could be the sleeping quarters of a ship, my fellow travelers undisturbed by the chorus of drunken voices in the next room. Outside the rice-paper-screened window, a fellow insomniac is breaking up a large block of ice with a metal pick, slowly and methodically, the way you might stab a juicy watermelon in the summer heat just to hear the sound of the knife. The thud of the pick and the crash of the ice chunks into a plastic tub echo loudly off the buildings of the abandoned street. I've forgotten my earplugs so I reach through a hole in the rice paper and close the thin sliding glass window behind it in a feeble attempt to muffle the sound. I'm too tired and too lazy to reach for my jeans, resting uncomfortably on the floor, and venture outside to confront the ice block murderer. The room heats up immediately. As my body begins to sweat, I open the window again, deciding to sacrifice some semblance of sonic serenity for a cooler room temperature.

Through a thin wooden door is a small tearoom — the nerve center of Toji-an youth hostel, a welcoming beehive of activity, a crossroads filled with weary, cash-poor travelers of all ages and nationalities who gather around a short table, exchanging stories and travel recommendations like old friends. I love this place, its consistently inviting energy, and the people who always seem interested in making new friends. Yellowing postcards from almost every country on the globe are pinned to the walls, testimonies of belated appreciation from the nomadic souls who once called these rooms "home" for a night or two.

Earlier that evening, a blue-tinted television screen sheepishly displayed Roman Polanski's embarrassingly bad film "The Ninth Gate" (Johnny Depp, what are you doing in this movie?), secretly hoping the room's occupants would be too engrossed in conversation to notice.

A group of liquored but articulate Australian blokes are the tearoom's current tenants. The noisy gathering has just returned from an undisclosed location in search of the hard-boiled egg and toast breakfast the hostel serves every morning at 5 a.m. before they retire to their darkened rooms. I'm guessing that there are six people in the room, based on the pastiche of voices rising and falling like the predictable dynamics of a baroque chamber piece. My defective deductive powers tell me they're teachers, too, because they always return to classroom stories whenever their desultory conversation reaches an impasse. Fellow travelers always seem to bond through shared observations — usually negative — about the inaccessible culture they're making half-hearted attempts to understand, but I often wonder if such easy agreements aren't evidence of an unwillingness to more deeply investigate their surroundings.

The leader, or the one who talks the most, his Aussie accent so precise that he appears to be mocking it, eventually proposes a question that makes me sit up in bed and listen more closely in the gray darkness of my room. "If you could strap dynamite to your body and sacrifice yourself to eliminate one thing on this earth, what would you blow up?" After a short pause, a girl's voice responds: "I guess I'd blow up the bathrooms at my high school." The leader responds with an incredulity in his voice that raises it an octave: "You'd sacrifice your body for that? Come on, mate, I'm talking about something bigger, and politically

significant, like blowing up the halls of the U.S. Congress or the White House."

Other voices intervene and the conversation fragments, atom-like, into smaller unintelligible pieces. Perhaps I'm no longer listening because I'm still pondering the implications of the leader's initial question and the powerless frustration behind it — a familiar refrain of helplessness from the growing numbers of politically unrepresented who wish to create significant change in a world that has long since spiraled out of their control and where unrestrained violence is the rule of law. But I fully understand the unmitigated anger behind the question as well as the desire for rapid, irrevocable change, and some much-needed political justice.

The American military has just routed a mostly invisible enemy in Iraq, despite consistent warnings from the simian simpleton George Bush and his cabinet of ventriloquists that its army possessed weapons of mass destruction and was about to use them. Then, the American military staged the toppling of a statue of its former despotic ally Saddam Hussein for the benefit of no one but the compliant American media. The dust has yet to settle on this unprovoked invasion and already the second war has begun: the battle for corporate contracts to rebuild Iraqi infrastructure — sickening and sad. It's no wonder the American government is now hated by its English-speaking allies. With its shunning of the UN and refusal to comply with international agreements, Bush and his oligarchy have made it clear that they will use the American military to intervene anywhere in the world in order to establish global economic dominance. As these thoughts flow through my head, I'm filled with a familiar sadness that only begins to dissipate with the first unwelcome light of dawn two hours later. ☆



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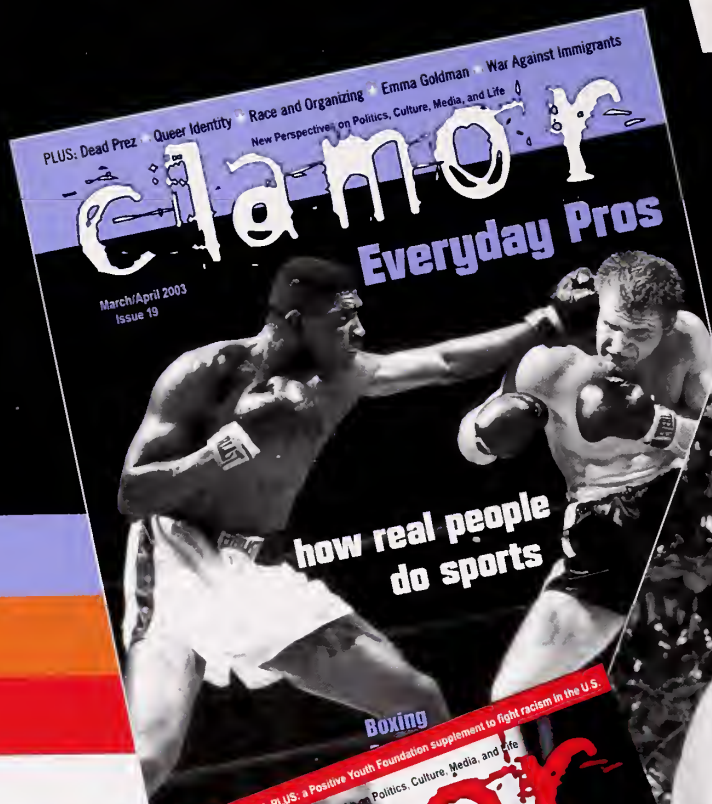
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